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THE IRRESISTIBLE

Mrs. FERRERS

ARABELLA KENEALY

CC



Wishing Lady Fischer

a pleasant journey, and a  
safe return, with much  
love from      Father & Mother



1895 DEC 15  
1895 DEC 15

# THE IRRESISTIBLE MRS. FERRERS

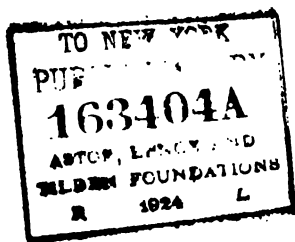
BY  
ARABELLA KENEALY

AUTHOR OF

"SOME MEN ARE SUCH GENTLEMEN," "THE MARRIAGE YOKE,"  
"THE WHIPS OF TIME," "THE MATING OF ANTHEA,"  
"THE WOMAN-HUNTER," ETC.



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*The Irresistible Mrs. Favers*

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# The Irresistible Mrs. Ferrers

## CHAPTER I

### MALET ARRIVES

**M**ALET opened his eyes with a start, and stared out through the window. He sprang to his feet and set his fingers on the handle of the door. The man opposite made a half-instinctive movement as though to intercept him, should he have it in his mind to jump out.

The notion was no sooner bred than it was stifled, however.

The name of the station and afterwards that of a well-known firm of drapers advertised in blue letters on a mustard-yellow ground were already receding so rapidly when his intuitive flash awakened him to the fact of having missed his station, that a glance showed him it was too late now to alight. He ground an exclamation of annoyance between his teeth, and dropped again into his corner.

It annoyed him to detect a half-quizzical smile on the face of the man opposite. There were addle-pated fools who saw comedy in everything! Who with an egg-cupful of brains should see anything amusing in the fact of a man, lost in thought, being carried past his station—Heaven knew whither? Corry would no doubt have come to meet him, would suppose that he had missed his train, and would give him up for that evening. Corry's house was three miles from the station, and it

was possible that he would fail to get a cab or any other sort of vehicle to take him and his belongings to the house. The afternoon was chill, a drizzle of rain had begun to fall; he was worn out by the labors and distresses of the day; he did not know the way to Corry's house; Carry would be waiting tea for him—the whole thing was a vexatious muddle, particularly coming as a climax to his hideous experiences of the morning. And there was that addle-pated noodle opposite grinning behind his mustache like a schoolboy grinning at a Punch and Judy show!

He discovered that the train was slowing down again. Good luck! After all, he could not have been carried more than a mile and a half beyond his destination.

Putting out his head, he saw that they were approaching a station, the smallest of its kind he remembered to have seen, being no more than a narrow platform with a hand-rail, and a roof of corrugated iron.

The train stopping, he took down his dressing-bag and his sticks and umbrella from the rack, and alighted briskly.

His expedition served him in no stead however, for half-way down he found the narrow platform blocked by a knot of travellers descending from a Pullman coach.

He stood with his bag and his sticks waiting until they should have made room for him to pass.

No other passengers got out; there was neither station-master nor porter. Nor was there waiting-room or booking-office. He had scarcely realized these facts before he further realized that this was not a public station at all, but was merely a private platform such as Railway Companies permit a few privileged persons to erect (at a rental) in their parks, for their own and the use of their friends.

Accordingly, it was with a sense of profound chagrin that, unable to pass them, he remained an unwilling and abashed spectator of the descent from the train of a

handsome woman, with a cold, rebellious face, and of a boy of twelve, still handsomer—the rest of the passengers being obviously her servants, a maid and two footmen.

He had an impulse, bred of his chagrin, to explain himself and to apologize for his mistake, but the woman's face and her abstracted gaze, showing as though she were as unconscious of his presence as she was indifferent to his intrusion, nipped his courtesies in bud. All he could do was to crowd into the diffident raising of his hat, as her servants made room for him, as much of courtesy and apology as a raised hat is capable of expressing.

Her servants, perhaps because of her presence, possibly because of his appearance, confined their censure of his conduct to heated under-glances.

Outside the little station, in a broad drive through a fir-wood, stood a carriage with a pair of bays, and behind this a baggage-brake. A footman, waiting expectant at the carriage door, opened it obsequiously, but with a hint of surprise in his face as the stranger appeared. Malet made a negative gesture and passed on.

Not until his back had recovered from a scorch of eyes as the sharp trot of hooves sounded presently behind him and the equipage flashed past, did he recapture his self-respect.

Then he forgot his embarrassing trespass for considerations of more moment. Having blundered, as he had clearly done, into somebody's park, the next thing to be done was, obviously, to find his way out again. With an instinct to avoid the house, to which the drive would lead him, he struck off into the first path that presented, a footpath winding through the wood.

The gloom of a September afternoon was gathering, a northeast wind, keen as a razor, was shaving the face of the earth. The rain, now falling faster, dripped from the soaked fir-branches and plashed with flat, depressing sounds on his umbrella. As the keen wind swept

their tress-like foliage, the trees seemed to unburden woes to it with shuddering sighs.

With their tossing swathes of leafage, they suggested women weeping, with dishevelled hair. The suggestion pierced the armor of passivity he had worn all day, and found a memory.

A few months earlier he had come on Pansy weeping so, with sighings and dishevelled hair. Not that her hair was dark and tragic—these firs suggested dark and tragic women—but something of their woefulness had been in her when he had come upon her unexpectedly, crying desperately, her blonde hair falling round her in disorder. She was neither dark nor tragic. Such women had no charm for him, the law of attraction being that of contrast, and he—Heaven knew!—being surely dark enough and prone enough to tragedy for two.

It had been her very lightness, her white-rose skin, her laughing gray eyes, her flaxen hair that rippled as with mirth, and the gay, inconsequent temperament that went with all this, which had attracted him.

Shallow? Well, of course, student of human nature as he was, he had known that. But, being a writer of fiction and given to idealizing, he had thought of her shallowness as immaturity merely, a pretty fault of youth which would pass with pretty youth. That the carelessness and lightness which had attracted him, as, too, that the rose-leaf fairness he had so admired, would have proved his—and her—undoing, he had not anticipated.

He had thought of her as a gay and childlike creature to brighten his home and to charm his sombre moods, forgetting that she was a woman in a world of men. And then he had come upon her that evening, weeping as he had never thought she could have wept, and as only a child would have wept for the headache she had given him as reason for her tears. And a week later, ringing

up his home from a telephone call-office, her light treble had trilled back.

"It's no good, darling. I can't possibly go. He is coming back early to finish his stupid old book."

Should he ever forget the sense of electrocution occasioned by that telephonic answer? For, in a flash, he had divined the rest. He must have uttered some involuntary exclamation that betrayed him; for he heard a smothered cry of consternation, and at once the line had been disconnected. Then, after keeping an urgent engagement, he had forged home, only to find that she had fled, and, as a note which she had left informed him, had fled with his best friend.

The *decree nisi* had been pronounced on the day this story opens, the case having been undefended. He had driven straight from the Court to King's Cross, bolting out of ear-shot and of eye-shot of all who knew him, to bury his shame and his bereavement in this out-of-the-way refuge his nephew, Peter Corry, offered him.

The fame which had crowned his hard struggle to the front of literature was now his bane. Every paper in the kingdom had made capital—and very bold headlines—of the divorce suit of the well-known author. Portraits of him and of Pansy and of that third who had put them asunder seemed to cry a brutal, "Bo, here we are again!" from every journal he unfolded.

His friends ceased suddenly from talking as he approached, for it is neither civil nor agreeable to discuss a man's matrimonial fiasco in his hearing. Strangers in the streets and parks nudged one another, and stared inquisitively at him as he passed. Some grinned with an insensate notion that matrimonial infidelity is the pivot of farce.

Others glanced compassion, but the majority looked merely frankly curious to see how a man, and a great man—for Malet's standing in the world of letters en-

titled him to be considered this—showed under such discomfiting circumstances. And no matter how dignified he may contrive to make it, a man's demeanor, under such circumstances, is necessarily sustained at a heavy cost of wear and tear to heart and nerves.

He had been at his wits' end to find escape from all this odious attention. A Londoner, born and bred, and one essentially of London tastes, he had no liking for the country, hated traveling, and was desperately unhappy anywhere out of England. Moreover, in traveling one met every one he knew, and was forced to add to his acquaintance. And, rendered morbidly sensitive by his grief and mortification, he had come to dread the sound of his name even, since the sound of it had come to make probes for his wounds of the eyes of persons hearing it.

All things considered, he had told himself bitterly that to escape his kind he would be reduced to the necessity of joining a Polar expedition.

And then Corry's note had shown him a simpler way out.

"DEAR UNCLE CHRIS,

"Carry and I are so sorry about all this we see in the papers. When the racket's over, come for as long as you like to us for rest and change. We are right out of everything here, far from the madding crowd and so forth, and you can be as quiet as you please. So come when you like. Only let us know a day or two beforehand.

"Your affectionate nephew,

"PETER."

Of the unexpected which is said to happen, it happens sometimes that in hours of trouble those from whom we have expected least do most for us. Corry,

whom he had not seen for five years, had not seen indeed since he had been present at his wedding, was the last person in the world to whom he would have looked for succor.

The only son of his only sister, now dead, she having been widowed and of straitened means, he had paid the expenses of his nephew's up-bringing at a time when to do so had meant doing without many things himself. For he had then been fighting desperately to get a foothold on the ladder of literature—and to this ladder many are called but few chosen.

Later, when the boy had qualified in medicine, Malet, now beginning to climb, had spared a round sum to buy a country practice for him, and had never heard another word from him.

He possessed too much intuitive knowledge of his kind, and too much practical experience of his kin, to expect gratitude for benefits conferred. Accordingly, Peter's warm-hearted letter and cordial invitation, following upon five years of unbroken silence, had occasioned him almost as much surprise as it had occasioned relief. For he caught, as the drowning at straws, at the haven it offered. Down there in the backwoods of life, unknown and unknowing—for who had ever heard of Foxgate in Hampshire?—he might hide himself until some other man's divorce suit or trial for murder should have re-engaged the public mind.

And now, this evening, as he walked beneath the weeping firs, with the rain plashing dismally on his umbrella, he was on his way to Corry's house.

Following directions supplied at a lodge-gate by which he made his exit from this park of the cold rebellious woman he had seen upon the platform, he found the house about half a mile down the road.

"Roseberry" had been imprinted in big red letters upon Peter's note-paper. "Roseberry" was imprinted in big black letters on the top rail of the white gate



before an imposing red-brick Elizabethan house which suddenly confronted him.

That he had heard no news from Corry had told him that Corry had been doing sufficiently well to have needed no further help from him. But that Corry had been doing so well as this substantial dwelling augured, he had not suspected. A nice, clean-skinned, blue-eyed youngster he had been when Malet had last met him, but not one to set the Thames afire. A modest competency had been the utmost to have been expected from Peter's capacities.

However, here was "Roseberry" on the gate, and moreover here was "Mr. Peter Corry, Physician and Surgeon," black-lettered on a large and highly polished brass plate affixed to the gate-post.

Clearly—for Corry had brought nothing to the finances of the establishment—Corry's modicum of brains had been invested to the best account.

In the drive he was confronted suddenly by a reflection that in accepting Corry's invitation he had failed to reckon with Mrs. Corry. And experience had shown him that in making his abode with others, the mistress of a house was a person preëminently to be reckoned with.

All that he knew of his nephew's wife he had gathered from seeing her married to Peter, her face shrouded half the time behind a mist of tulle, and the other half wreathed with the eddying smiles convention demands from a bride, as, one after another, her acquaintances are driven past her to murmur such felicitations as those driven on behind do not cut abruptly short. And even under these advantageous circumstances he had not liked her. Had he now met her in the street, he would not have known her from a hundred other thin, plain, black-haired, and, as he had considered her, quite unattractive young persons of the opposite sex. But an impression remaining of her as antipathetic threw itself across his

mind, a minor shadow amid major ones, as he strode up the drive to Peter's front door.

The brain of the writer is by nature and by habit subtly receptive and perceptive. It is endowed, as it were, with X-ray penetrative qualities, an added sense which enables its possessor to see and to overhear through doors and walls, be these of wood or of hearts, the things that lie within things.

And by means of such a gift of super-sensitiveness, for he did not turn his head, Malet, as he passed a window overlooking the drive, now derived a vision of a bright interior, a warm and gaily colored room illumined by an orange-shaded lamp, with a fire of leaping flame upon a cosy hearth, a cheerful tea-table of shining silver and of glinting china, and in the pleasant heart of this, lounging in cosy chairs drawn close together, a man and a woman—Peter and Carry—smiling content into one another's faces.

This flash of a happy home-interior occasioned first a poignant heart-thrust by the contrast it suggested with his own bereft condition, and then a feeling of chagrin at the obvious forgetfulness of him at this contented fireside.

While he had been flattering himself, or to speak more precisely—for he was considerate of disposition—vexing himself with the notion of Peter driving in the rain upon the fruitless quest of meeting him, and of Carry waiting tea, Peter and Carry had plainly not been putting themselves about in the least on his account, but had sat down in their easy chairs to drink their tea regardless of their arriving or their non-arriving uncle.

Nor did Peter trouble to come out into the hall to greet him when he knocked upon the door. Not until the visitor was ushered by a manservant in sleek black—Peter had prospered truly beyond all expectation—into the domestic interior of which he had caught an intuitive flash, did it seem that he was remembered.

Now Corry sprang to his feet, and cordially smiling, gave him a hearty grip of welcome.

"Hello, Uncle Chris! Why, we had given you up. You never walked in the rain, did you? I sent the carriage to meet you. I suppose you missed it. Some blunder of Hanson's, no doubt!"

Then, having gripped and welcomed, he passed him on to Mrs. Corry.

"You know the wife. Saw her last with a wreath of orange blossoms upon her snowy brows—isn't it? That's five years ago. Jove, how time passes! Now we're regular old married folk."

Malet, shaking hands with her, confirmed that antipathetic impression he had had of her as a bride. He saw, moreover, that the feeling was reciprocal. Of this the chill stiff hand she gave to him and her uncompromising gaze left him in no doubt. Not only did she for some reason—or for no reason—dislike him, but she resented his coming.

He suspected that Peter had sent off his cordial letter of invitation without consulting her, either on an impulse or with full intention, knowing that if consulted she would have vetoed the proposal.

"You are just in time for tea," she said formally. "Peter and I waited until the carriage got back. We had only just begun. Do you take sugar?"

Corry, plainly intending to cover her absence of warmth, fussed and blustered a little.

"But you will like some fresh tea," he said. "Have some fresh tea made, Carry. Do you mind whether it's China or Indian, uncle? I'll ring, Carry."

He moved to the bell. Malet, however, although he stood more in awe of his digestion than he did of some other things, stood at the moment even more in awe of a hostess who saw no occasion to trouble about him, and, further, showed no disposition to pretend that she did. He hurriedly declined to have fresh tea made for him;

meekly submitted that he did not take sugar and that he liked his tea weak.

He added with a forced laugh, "As to Indian or China tea, I'm told that one wrecks the nerves and the other wrecks the digestion. If that is so, I would rather leave it to chance than invidiously decide which of my ill-used members I will further ill-use. But is it so?"

Peter shook his head.

"Ask me something easier. There isn't any medical statement or opinion that hasn't as many chaps against it as there are for it; that is, if it's a week old—old enough for some one to have seen it stated somewhere and to write to the *B.M.J.* denouncing it as bunkum—in parliamentary language, of course."

To his other evidences of prosperity, Peter added the air, smiling and complacent, of the man who has succeeded, but has succeeded without "losing feathers," as we are told the "winning cock" should do. Malet, observing him, decided that it would have been better for him, as regarded brain and character, if he had had to make a harder fight for it. Nephew Peter was quite too sleek of mind and body for his thirty years of age.

"Pass Mr. Malet the muffins, and don't talk shop, Peter," his wife said crisply.

But there was a little kindling of the eyes she turned upon him which showed that she was fond of him. And from Peter's good-natured gleam and smile round at her, and his retort, "All right, old girl," as he leisurely obeyed her, Malet gathered that the two understood and were attached to one another.

Before the meal was over he had corrected his view of Mrs. Peter as quite ordinary. He still felt her and believed he would always feel her to be antipathetic. But although thin and plain, even ugly at times, there was a certain attraction about her. His eyes turned

to her again and again, drawn and arrested by a sort of delicate trimness, a pleasing quality of poise and suppleness which showed in all her movements. It was guile rather than grace, lacking the spontaneity and charm of grace. It showed like a calculated and a practised skill of movement, a conscious exploiting of muscle by mind, which gave to the gestures of her long and nimble fingers, depositing sugar in cups or pouring tea, a temperamental value and interest that drew and held the eye.

Intuitive as he was, he was puzzled to place her in his category of human types. The small head, subtly poised upon the long spare throat, the flattened brows, their flatness accentuated by the mode in which her dull-black hair ("black-lead" hair, he described it to himself) was parted and brushed low upon her forehead, the high cheek-bones, the deep-set gleaming eyes of slate-blue color, the heavy lids, the nose, low of bridge and with expanded flattened nostrils, the cold wide mouth with its pale, curveless lips, the jaw square but delicate-boned, and the firm chin—What did these denote? There was something primitive in the conformation which repelled, and yet the expression was keen and highly civilized, and the look of sensuality inseparable from flattened features was redeemed by an air of fastidiousness.

Malet had not finished his half-muffin—with fears, alas, for his digestion, but with even greater fear of Peter's wife!—before he had wholly reconstructed his impression of her. This was by no means one of a hundred plain, thin, characterless young women to be met with every day. This was a woman of strange and devious nature, a woman of surprises. In the drive he had been all at once confronted by the fact that in his sojourn at "Roseberry," Mrs. Corry would be a person to be reckoned with, but not before he had disposed of that half-round of muffin with which but

few other women would have compelled him to affront his economy, did he realize the degree to which Mrs. Corry would require to be reckoned with.

Her antipathy to him and her resentment at his coming would need to express themselves more aggressively than the refinement overlying her flat features made likely, however, before she would force him to quit the house until the interesting problem of her character had been solved. For the study of character was not only the inspiration of his art, it was the passion of his life. Given an interesting personality, he would labor long and suffer many things until his brain had picked the lock that opened the door upon its secrets.

He was a kind man and a sympathetic one, and his probings were prompted by warm human interest rather than by literary curiosity, merely. He was known to his world as a profound and subtle expert in human character, and the secrets he read in human faces were the raw stuff he worked up later into the pathos and comedy of the most brilliant and moving novels of his day.

## CHAPTER II

MR. AND MRS. PETER CORRY

**I**SAY, did you run here from the station, or how in the world did you manage to come so far in so short a time?" Corry asked suddenly, as he stood waiting at the tea-table, while Carry made his third large cup of tea for him. It was clear that the problem had only just presented itself to his easy-pacing wits.

"He passed Foxgate station, and got out at the Travenhoe platform," Carry stated quietly. Her tone expressed vexation.

"I did," Malet admitted, "although I can't imagine how you guessed it."

"You could not have walked in the time, and there are pine-needles from the Travenhoe drive on your boots," she answered, glancing at the boots.

It was plain from a little pleased smile which played about her lips that she prided herself upon her quickness of observation.

Corry, receiving his refilled cup from her, glanced at her with beaming pride.

"Oh, Carry's as sharp as they're made," he said, "a perfect Machiavelli. It's no use trying to deceive her. She's a tip-top detective lost to the world by marrying a country doctor."

"You need not rub it in—how much I sacrificed myself," she retorted drily.

All at once, with a strange and supple movement, she lowered her small flattened head upon her long

neck, then held it poised again as though it were a crest. In a flash Malet had placed her. She was of the snake-type, cold, quick, flat-browed, lithe, and subtle.

The flash was succeeded by a rush of disappointment. Here was no new and hitherto unrecognized type to be dramatically rendered into fiction. Wendell Holmes had been before him with his Elsie Venner.

Holmes, out of his medical bias, had attributed his heroine's snake-like characteristics to ante-natal impressions affecting the mother. Later biology, however—and Malet was at home in biology—had suggested to him that the resemblances to the lower creatures which are found in man, have some more basic origin than that of accident or maternal impressions.

With theories of his own in view, though disappointed of being the first in fiction to portray a new and interesting feminine type, he consoled himself with anticipations of observing the manner in which the snake-like traits he saw in Carry would show themselves in daily life, and the developments that they would bring about.

Her guile of movement and the impression she had given him of a keener mental centralization in her muscles than was common now explained themselves. For the snake beyond all other creatures, in its sinewy strength and sinuous grace, shows muscle-power carried to its fullest and most potent issues.

Without aid of limb or leverage outside itself, it coils, uncoils, and glides to its appalling ends, as strong as steel, as smooth as velvet, and as sure as clockwork, a cold and glittering self-centredness mining its terrible muscles, wasting no time or force, but at the calculated instant suddenly darting into action, like lightning forking out of cloud.

His instinctive antipathy to her was also explained. Beyond all other creatures, he had an invincible dislike to snakes.



With these reflections weaving in his brain, his eyes had been dropped upon his cup, a hand mechanically stirring tea in which there was no sugar to be stirred.

He raised them now from the rather lurid picture he had conjured, raised them and looked at the woman of whom he had conjured it.

He almost laughed aloud. She sat behind her cups and saucers, a plain and quiet, self-possessed young person, punctiliously neat, no thread of her smoothly brushed, sleekly coiled black-lead hair out of place, her mole-colored velveteen frock soberly swathing her spare and ineffective figure. Neither in look nor in demeanor was there a hint of the tragic, of the dramatic, nor of evil about her. If there were, truly, snake-propensities within her, they lay for the present abeyant and unrealized. He felt that she herself as little suspected them as one observer in ten thousand would have read them into her.

There had been a pause of silence in the conversation. Then Corry, breaking it, laughed.

"Pretty cool of you to use Lord Lygon's platform, wasn't it?" he said. "And how did you know there was a platform and that the train would stop there? I suppose you recognized some of the party at King's Cross."

"Oh, of course not," Malet answered rather testily. "I should not have been guilty of such an impertinence. But having passed my station, I naturally got out at the next stopping-place. It wasn't until I was out that I discovered it wasn't a public platform."

"Who of the Travenhoe people came down—he or she?" Carry asked with interest.

"A handsome woman with a boy about twelve years old—a beautiful youngster; evidently hers. These two, and a party of servants."

"Lady Lygon herself and Cyril Lygon. Did you think her beautiful?"

"She would be if her expression were pleasing. She looked as though she had just stepped out of a refrigerator."

Carry made a supple movement of her hands, a movement eloquent of condemnation.

"No wonder—the brute!" she commented vigorously.

"Uncle Chris will think you are calling *her* names, poor woman!" Peter said.

"Oh no," Malet answered smiling. "I know that epithet in that particular tone of voice applies to our sex always. Besides, I've heard Lygon talked of at the Club. There, I believe, he was called an ass."

"In connection with the beautiful Mrs. Ferrers?" Corry asked.

"She was *one* of them."

Corry raised his brows.

"One of them? I never heard of any other."

Malet laughed.

"The atmosphere of smoke-rooms fogs the brain," he said. "Where two or three cigars and whiskies are gathered together, one woman is easily multiplied into a whole——"

Corry coughed, and glanced at Carry.

Malet, halting, followed his glance. A certain prudish stiffening of her features warned him not to finish. Speech in mixed company has now become so lax that he was surprised to have offended in this relation.

He met Peter's eyes. They glinted at him quizzically. He gave a little knowing shake of the head, as though to say.

"We must mind our p's and q's before Carry."

"Carry's got her knife into Lygon," he remarked. "Perhaps if she knew him personally, she'd tell a different story. He's no end of a chap in looks as well as brains. They say he has brains enough to be Premier, or anything he likes, if only he cared about it."

"He's a horrid, flirting wretch," Carry observed, as

vigorously as before. "Please don't talk about him to me, Peter."

She addressed her husband, but she looked at Malet, her face still cold and prudish.

"That seemed a nice boy," Malet said, to break new, unoffending ground.

Corry agreed.

"Isn't he a fine chap? He's the apple of his mother's eye. He's all she has."

"Is she much here?"

"She spends as much of her time here with the boy as she can. They say she dislikes society. I can't make her out. She looks as though she were breaking her heart over Lygon. But when you see them together—which isn't often—you see she is only an icicle. I don't wonder——"

He broke off short, glanced again at Carry, glanced quizzically again at Malet, and set a wholly different finish to his speech from that he had intended: "I don't wonder you say she looks as though she had come out of a refrigerator."

"I'm particularly sorry you got out at their 'halt,'" Carry now said stiffly, "because I told her you were coming to-day—she happened to mention that she likes your books. And she is sure to guess who you were, and will think I suggested it to you. It will seem horribly cool of me."

"You know her?"

"Oh yes, we know her," she rejoined quickly, with an air of importance.

"Not socially," Corry added honestly, "but I meet her on committees, and Carry meets her at bazaars and so forth."

"I am sure she is always particularly nice and friendly," Carry insisted; "and I'm perfectly certain she would like to be friends with us, if only she were not such a—such a——"

"Recluse?" Malet suggested almost involuntarily, the habit of fitting words to thoughts being strong in him.

Carry, self-willed and resenting him, declined his aid, however.

"No, not recluse," she said. "I mean retiring. And now," she continued, "she will think we told you to use her platform because it's the nearest to our house. And of course she will be vexed. It was a frightful pity you let yourself be carried past Foxgate station. Are you absent-minded?"

The tone of contempt she gave to the adjective moved Malet to claim it. For by this time he had realized that if he wished to call his soul his own in dealing with this hostile little woman, narrow of brain and tyrannical of will as he saw her to be, he must assert himself from the outset.

"I am at times," he answered quietly. "And this was clearly one of the times."

She did not speak, but it was plain from her air that she had no opinion of one who could perpetrate a foolishness of which she was, herself, incapable. Other—and great—things he had done of which she was likewise incapable, she ignored.

"But you shall not suffer in Lady Lygon's opinion," he added amicably. "I will write her a note of apology this evening, and take the blame of my stupid blunder on my own shoulders."

Now she softened. Clearly Lady Lygon's opinion was a thing of moment to her. Her eyes lighted.

"Oh, will you? Please do. I suppose it would be quite the thing. Yes, please write. It would be so detestable for her to think us presuming or anything like that."

Mollified, she now bethought her of her hostess-duties.

"But would you not like to go to your room? After your journey you must be tired. Peter, take Mr. Malet up."

"Where have you put him?"

"In No. Seven."

Malet, following his nephew up a handsomely carpeted staircase and down a broad electric-lighted corridor, reflected further and with heightened mystification upon the young man's manifest prosperity.

Ushered into a large and pleasant room, in the furnishing whereof there seemed likewise to have been no stint, his mystification broke into speech.

"You seem to be doing well, Peter. I had no notion you could have made so much headway in so short a time."

Peter, smiling, rubbed his hands complacently.

"Yes, I'm getting on first rate," he said. "Far beyond my expectations. And I've got you to thank for it, Uncle Chris. You've been a brick to me, that's certain." He paused, and then resumed: "I say, you won't like it talked about, I know. But I must just say how sorry I am about this confounded business. Rotten bad luck, I call it. But you've cut off from her to-day, of course. Of course you got your release all right?"

"I did."

Corry gripped his hand.

"Congrats!" he said. He went out quickly, leaving Malet staring down into the fire blazing on the hearth.

A sigh broke from him.

Yes, he had got his release. He had won his right to be congratulated on the break-up of his life! If Pansy, bright pretty creature that she was, had never filled his heart, had wholly failed to realize the hopes and faiths he had had about the fostering influences marriage would have upon her, at all events she had brought much that was pleasing and charming into his previously solitary lot. For a heart, like a purse, is all the better for having something in it.

## CHAPTER III

### SOME SURPRISES

**H**IS baggage having been sent on from the station, Malet had declined Peter's proffer of his butler to assist in its unpacking.

"Bless my soul, boy," he had protested, "if I am a rich man, I have acquired none of the habits of the rich man. It would weary me beyond description to have a flunky always shadowing me, like a too substantial ghost."

Peter had laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"You literary chaps," he said, "have notions. I'm only common clay, and I prefer not to fag when I can get some one to do it for me."

Malet, now left to himself, proceeded to his unpacking. He got no farther, however, than a stage of putting out the silver-backed brushes and other contents of the first dressing-bag he had ever indulged in, and had indulged in the better to equip the dull old solitary that he was, for his bridal trip with youthful brightness, when the glint of light on their silver backs brought recollections of the days when he had used them first.

He flung himself into a chair, and yielding to the dejection he had been fighting all day, dropped into a drab study.

What a thing was life, all ups and downs and, bitter luck! more downs than ups; all tags that pulled the wrong way or that pulled on nothing; loose ends which, lightly touched, unraveled all that one had wrought! A man might well have thought that after such an

uphill struggle against odds, fate would have granted him an interlude of peace. Pansy had seemed to be so gay and docile, asking no more from life than ease and sunshine, leisure and means to enjoy her harmless frivolings and love of frocks. And he had taken her out of poverty to give these things to her, her father being a struggling artist, and she since babyhood his drudge and model.

He had never thought her woman enough to have distinguished so far between one man and another as with a stroke of her will to have broken with the one in order, as she had now done, to cast in her lot with the other. He had believed her one of the purely domesticated of her kind, who take a husband—with a sigh, perhaps, and sundry wistful glances backward—but who, once over the threshold of a home and an establishment of their own, lock the door forever on romance. A new spirit was abroad, however. Like a boomerang-blow he remembered that he, personally, had done something by his writings to promote that spirit, to broaden the horizon of woman's liberty in love and marriage.

He had known, of course—who better?—that Pansy, immature and shallow as she was, could never be the object of the great passion of which he had all his life felt himself capable; and he would never have dreamed of making her his wife of free choice. The marriage—like the marriages of many men—had been in a manner forced upon him.

He had reached the age of forty-seven without having met his affinity, when Pansy, the daughter of his oldest friend and a girl he had known all her life, had come to him one evening, a pathetic little person in a threadbare frock, crying out her eyes because she had had no luncheon and would have no dinner; and, further, because her graceless father had brought his mistress home to live with them—a coarse, hard person of uncertain morals and too certain temper. Prone to

quixotic impulses despite his years and insight, he had then and there taken the weeping girl into his arms and in half-fatherly fashion had promised to take care of her for the future, and to see to it that she should not again lack meals or raiment.

Things had seemed to turn out better than he had anticipated, his girl-wife proving a bright and happy influence, until that day, some months before, when her treble tones had chirped along the telephone wire and had rung down the curtain on his pleasant little drama.

How the intonation of that "He" and "his stupid old book" had cut him to the quick! She had always, in her bright and pretty fashion, shown interest in his work, had listened pleasantly when he had read his best passages to her, and had purred her simple flatteries so artlessly. Rage simmered in his blood remembering how he had been fooled, how, student of character though he was, this twenty-year girl had deceived him. And yet he felt sorry for her, reviewing their two years of life together. A middle-aged writing chap, with brain and interests absorbed, he had made but a dull husband for a shallow, pleasure-loving girl. Under the best circumstances, the literary temperament he knew to be a serious handicap to domestic happiness.

The sound of a knock upon his door reached him in the depths of introspection.

He returned to the surface, and shook off heavy drops of thought from brow and eyes.

"Come in," he called.

A trim little white-capped housemaid brought a shining ewer of hot water.

"Dinner at half-past seven, if you please, sir," she said, as she wrapped a folded bath-towel, cosy-fashion, round it, and departed.

He rose with resolution, and determined never again to indulge these profitless and harrowing retrospections.



Let the past bury the past! Life was before him to be lived—work to be done. He had provided generously for his defaulting wife, and still more generously—in order to induce her lover to marry her—he had promised a further provision when the union should have been legalized.

He had done all he could. Let him now forget the whole dreary fiasco!

He found on descending to the drawing-room that he was not the sole guest of the house.

Peter was chatting genially in a cosy corner, beneath a shaded lamp, with a little woman of uncertain age, piebald of hair, and garbed in a gown which, tyro as he was in women's dress, struck him as quaintly old-fashioned, while Carry sat beside the fire knitting and pretending to listen to the animated talk of a red-haired, foxy man, with frowning brows and fingers stained with red and violet ink.

Malet thought it singular that he should have overlooked the ink-stains on his hands, seeing that he was using these all the while in an active service of gesticulation.

Malet making for the cosy corner, Carry lounged up from his settle and introduced him.

"My uncle, Mr. Christopher Malet, Lady Sarah Megan. You know my uncle's books, no doubt, Lady Sarah?"

"Oh, quite well, quite well," she said, and shook hands with him effusively. But her eyes evaded his so guiltily that he suspected she had never read a line he had written. "They're perfectly beautiful," she added with emphasis, as though to refute his unvoiced suspicion.

The red-haired man, now pausing in his talk to knit his brows at Malet in the place of knitting them at Carry, who Malet could see was knitting her wool with-

out listening to anything that he was saying, Corry introduced him likewise.

"Mr. Christopher Malet—Mr. Thackeray."

"William Makepeace," the other added, with so much gravity that Malet, supposing a jest intended, laughed. But Thackeray knitted his red brows so hard when Malet laughed, that Malet said apologetically, "A member, perhaps, of the family of the great Thackeray?"

"*The* great Thackeray," the lesser one rejoined majestically.

"Mr. Thackeray is rewriting *Vanity Fair*," Corry said, catching his uncle's eye. There was a twinkle in his own.

"Really?" Malet commented. No doubt there was an inflection of surprise in his voice. For Thackeray knitted his red brows even more severely, and said with some resentment:

"Really, sir! I trust you have no objection."

"Oh, none at all," Malet answered, the man being clearly hypersensitive upon the point, although his reason for being so was obscure. "To tell the truth, the book is such a masterpiece that one had never thought of anything being added to it."

Thackeray waved his ink-stained fingers as though in preface to some spirited rejoinder, but just then dinner was announced.

Corry presented his arm to Lady Sarah, and assigned his wife to Mr. Thackeray. Malet followed in the rear.

In a large and very comfortable dining-room a round table, sparkling with glass and silver and tastefully adorned with flowers, was set beside a glowing fire.

The party having disposed themselves, soup was served from a side table by the well-mannered butler, assisted by a smart parlormaid.

Thackeray sat on Mrs. Corry's right, Malet beside him.

"Is there any milk in it?" Lady Sarah suddenly;

demanded in a loud, impressive voice. She looked at Malet fixedly.

"None, my lady," the parlormaid assured her.

"Then you may give me just a spoonful, as there is no milk in it."

Her eyes dwelt so expectantly on Malet that he felt some remark was required of him. At a loss to guess what this might appropriately be, however, he began upon his soup.

"Mr. Malet does not ask me why I so particularly inquired if there was milk in the soup," she said in tones of injury to Corry. "Being a writer and a student of character, one might have supposed such a marked characteristic would have struck him as extraordinary."

Malet, thus challenged, defended himself.

"To tell the truth, Lady Sarah, I mistook it for a question of taste or for some dietetic tyranny on my nephew's part."

She gave a little laugh of triumph.

"There now!" she cried. "Even so remarkable a man makes mistakes sometimes. Guess again, Mr. Malet. The explanation is so very interesting."

Malet, in need of his dinner, began to thresh about feebly in his tired brain for clues to the puzzle. Corry came good-humoredly to the rescue.

"He's no good at guessing, Lady Sarah. I'm afraid his talent does not lie in that direction. I think you had better tell him."

"Then I will," she said genially. She leaned across the table. "And I think, Mr. Malet, you will agree that it is the most remarkable fact on record. The truth is, I was once chased by a cow across a field, and since then I have never been able to look milk in the face in any form except butter. Now, is not that extraordinary?"

"It seems so, certainly," Malet answered, on the horns of a dilemma. For her apparently intense seriousness

might be the crux of the jest. In which case he would, of course, be expected to laugh appreciatively.

He compromised by smiling feebly. It appeared that this was wrong, however.

"Oh, pray don't smile," she chid him sharply. "It is absolutely true. And it was not as though I had worn a scarlet cloak. In that case it would have been intelligible."

Either there was some confusion of ideas or confusion of statement. The scarlet cloak would have accounted—if tradition were true—for the cow (or did it apply to bulls only?) chasing the lady across the field, but would it account for the chased one's subsequent aversion to the produce of its species? Nonplused, yet anxious to please, he now looked grave and shook his head in silence.

He had hit upon the right demeanor. She broke into gurgles of chuckling laughter, her face fairly shining with pleasure.

"You and I are going to be friends," she said, darting her soup-spoon at him. "I see you understand me perfectly."

Then, as though suddenly remembering the claim of her soup, seeing that it was guiltless of milk, she fell upon it heartily, and seemed to forget him.

Corry, in answer to his perplexed glance, cast him a twinkle from the corner of an eye. He felt relieved. His brain was not softening. Corry, too, found the lady unusual.

Mrs. Corry, eating her soup, displayed an expressionless face, while Mr. Thackeray, who had declined this course, knitted his red brows upon a little pile of pills he had compounded from his bread and had built in a pyramid beside his plate, as though they had been miniature cannon-balls in a miniature dockyard. Yet although he had made and had piled them himself he seemed displeased with them, as an incoming War

Minister might have been with the ammunition-supplies of an outgoing War Minister. For suddenly, with a gesture of intolerance, he leveled them to the plane of the table-cloth, and began to re-mold and re-pile them.

"Are you busy on another book?" Peter asked Malet. "Clinking good story, your last! I can't think where you get all your notions from. Now, I could no more write a novel than I could fly."

"Or than I could write a prescription. It takes many sorts of men to make a world."

"I should have liked the book ever so much better if you had left out Lady Madge," Carry said. "She was the only unpleasant person in it. I can't think why writers put unpleasant people in their books, when they could fill them with all nice people if they only would."

"A book must have *some* semblance to actual life," Malet submitted dryly. He was rather sensitive about his characters. "And most readers demand a villain. People have complained to me that I don't paint my villains black enough."

"Oh, but she was so particularly horrid—quite improper, in fact. Have you really ever met any one so horrid?"

Mr. Thackeray ran his fingers through his thick red hair, and turned to Malet with an air of sympathy.

"This is how we authors are misconstrued," he protested. "Why, they have even misinterpreted me. You have read my *Vanity Fair* of course, sir. Everybody has. Well, you would scarcely believe it, but I find most persons quite misunderstand the character of that incomparable woman, Miss Rebecca Sharp." He laughed sardonically. "They go farther. They actually tell me—*me*, the author of the book—that she was a bad woman, a deceitful woman, a designing woman; even an immoral woman. They say Lord St——"he dropped his voice—"but until the ladies leave the room,

I cannot tell you all that has been said against that noble creature, who I may say without vanity is the very finest character in fiction: a heroine, my dear sir—a heroine of the first water, second to none in real or imaginary life.”

He paused for breath, and the pause being straight-way filled by Lady Sarah demanding with her previous impressiveness whether there were milk in the bread-sauce passed to her, one of Malet’s intuitive flashes let in light upon him—this, and Corry’s gleam of warning.

Before he had had time, however, to express surprise concerning this unusual view of Becky’s character, Lady Sarah further claimed his attention.

“Mr. Malet,” she said, “you heard me ask if there was milk in this bread-sauce.” She tapped her knife upon her plate. “You know the reason now. And you will never find me fail in my convictions. My aversion to milk in any form is quite unalterable, and is one of the most extraordinary features of the eighteenth century.”

Beaming and chuckling, she fell amiably upon her wing of chicken and the milkless sauce that garnished it.

Again Mr. Thackeray held him.

“All day long, sir,” he resumed, having manifestly stopped contemptuous ears against Lady Sarah’s trifling eccentricities, “I have been at work defending the fair fame of that great woman. For years I have been going through my book with that infinite capacity for taking pains which is the mark of genius, in order to discover by what slip of the pen or careless sentence I may have misled the world into misunderstanding her great character. Being something of a writer yourself, tell me, do you think the misapprehension can have arisen from the fact of my having called her ‘Becky’? I did so in a spirit of playful devotion far removed from irreverence, never for a moment dreaming of possible misapprehension.

"But in writing for average minds, great minds are liable to misconception. And this amazing—it seems to me perversely malignant—misconstruction of that woman's character may be due to the fact that I have presented her too colloquially in calling her 'Becky.' What, now, is your opinion?"

"You may be right, of course," Malet assented.

Thackeray laid down his knife and his fork, and rising in his chair, bowed ceremoniously.

"Sir, I am vastly obliged for your support," he said, "and the more so because I think you must be right—for you agree with me. The notion struck me recently. At once I bought a hundred copies of the book, and am now devoting myself to going carefully through them line by line, and obliterating with violet ink the word 'Becky,' wherever it occurs, and writing 'Miss Rebecca' with red ink in the margin. It is a great work and fatiguing. But I will spend the last drop of my blood in defending that spotless reputation against evil-minded readers."

"Bravo, Thackeray!" Corry cried good-humoredly. "You are an absolute—what's his name?—you know, that Knight of the Round Table. But finish your dinner now, there's a good chap, because you'll want all the strength you can muster to carry this great business through."

"Sir, I thank you, too," Mr. Thackeray rejoined politely, "for reminding me of that. I will do as you advise."

And he, too, fell upon his plate of chicken. And presently, having concluded the meal with five bananas, he asked that his coffee might be sent up to his room, and returned to the fray.

Mrs. Corry having carried off Lady Sarah to the drawing-room, Corry broke out with a laugh.

"Why, surely you knew. Surely I wrote you all about it. I certainly meant to. You never thought I could

keep up this house on a country general practice. Great Scott! it would have meant a thirty-pound cottage and a starvation life on something between two and three hundred a year. My senior partner in the practice you bought for me was clever in these cases, and we started this place. We have done famously; and since his death last year, the thing is in my hands entirely."

"This is a private lunatic asylum, then," Malet observed, not without distaste and some uneasiness.

Corry laughed again.

"We call it a Mental Rest-Home. It sounds prettier. The specimens you will meet are absolutely harmless. Mr. Thackeray——"

"His name is not also a delusion, then?"

"Oh no. It's his real name right enough—worse luck for him! Because it has been too great a one for his weak brain to carry. His people pay me seven hundred a year for keeping him busy and happy. Lady Sarah's people pay me four hundred a year—jolly mean of 'em!—for preserving them from the embarrassment of having that story of the cow and milk perpetually told at their patrician table."

"Is the story of her chase by the cow a delusion merely?" Malet asked, interested. To the brain-worker all phenomena of the brain are interesting.

Corry was no brain-worker, however, and its phenomena were to him merely a matter of finance.

He shrugged a too-well covered shoulder, and responded carelessly:

"Heaven knows! I've never asked. I'm paid four hundred a year to listen to it as often as she likes to tell it, and to keep her well and pleased. I don't care a button whether it is fact or fancy."

Malet considered the attitude callous. In reality, it was careless merely. He found later that although the science of his cases interested Peter little, he being a mere rule-of-thumb practitioner, he was nevertheless pa-



tient and genial and eminently kind to all his charges—kinder and more sympathetic perhaps than one more scientific might have been.

“How many besides these two have you in the house?”

“Four. I can only accommodate seven.”

“And I am No. Seven!”

Corry laughed as he finished his second glass of port.

“Oh, you’re sane enough.”

“It’s a big house for, comparatively, so few persons.”

“There are attendants. And some of the patients have suites of rooms.”

“Are some dangerous that they are shut away and need attendants?”

Corry glanced across at him.

“There is nothing to be afraid of. Two only are too queer for general society, disagreeable and of unpleasant habits—‘anti-social tendencies,’ we call them. Only one is dangerous—a homicidal maniac. He lives next door to you, by the way. But you need not be afraid. He has two men to look after him: two big muscular chaps. And one or the other is mostly with him. If you hear any rumpus at any time, you needn’t be alarmed. They know how to manage him all right.”

“I shall not be alarmed,” said Malet.

Their cigars finished, he excused himself from going to the drawing-room, and went up to his room.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CRY IN THE NIGHT

**B**EFORE entering his room, an impulse of awed curiosity led him to inspect the door of that adjoining it. He found it to be of solid steel, the grimness of its armored state being hidden by a velvet curtain.

Ignorant as he was of the phenomena of madness, he stood listening for sounds of inner conflict, his notion of a homicidal maniac being one with rolling, blood-shot eyeballs, frothing maybe at the mouth, and conducting himself for the most part like a bull in a china shop. All was silence, however. No sound, gruesome or otherwise, issued from the stronghold of the madman's prison.

He turned into his own room, and despite Peter's assurances, looked carefully to the lock of his door, and, further, slid up a curious little steel button he found in a grove of it. He was comforted to hear the whirr and click as of efficient mechanism moving into gear.

An imaginative man, according to the degree that he is imaginative, may be a coward and liable to die a thousand deaths; for the imagination not only magnifies and embellishes facts, but it conjures from them eventualities that are possible although improbable. While the circumstance that a thing is improbable, although possible, shuts it for the most part from the calculations of the unimaginative.

When put to it, the imaginative man will be braver than others, because his mind will nerve him in the teeth of odds, but his liability to picture danger where

danger is not, gives to one whose mind plays no such tricks upon him an advantage in phlegm and sheer stolidity.

Malet—knowing himself—locked and barred out not so much the actual madman as the hundred-and-one forms in which the madman might assail him by way of his imagination, did he leave a loophole for attack. Now, however, having seen to his defences, he could set a reassuring "Nobody can possibly get in!" as sentry at the door of thought.

He finished his unpacking, undressed, and taking a book, read in bed till a clock struck twelve. The notes fell like strokes across his conscience, for he knew that after his day of stress he owed it to his good servant, the body, to sleep.

And now his brain, set going by the interest awakened by his book, would not suffer him to sleep. He lay tossing and turning for two whole hours, beset by harassing reflections on the mad, distressful souls about him. Why was life as it was—full of trouble and distress? Lying there, weary and wretched, he could hear the Great Mills grinding, grinding, pounding, pounding, crushing the hapless grain of lives beneath their hammers.

Men talked of an All-Merciful God, a Tender Father, and some—poor fools!—looked trustingly to Him for ruth and succor. Yet did He not show Himself Deaf and Blind and Dumb to human miseries—a Great Inexorable Frammer of inexorable laws that no man could escape, till every jot and tittle had been fulfilled? That the laws were steel bars of cradles for the nurture of our human infancy was true, and that before this infancy a great illimitable Future lay, was doubtless equally true, yet notwithstanding, no one less than a Great Immutable—or Inexorable, for it meant the same thing—could help feeling sick to see the creatures in their helplessness and ignorance, torn and mangled on

the edges of these steel laws—the framework of their cradles.

Surely The Inexorable, out of His Omniscience, might have devised a way less cruel and less bloody! Surely He might at times give pause to His Inexorable Mills; let pass some blameless ones, unscathed; remit the sins of some fathers to some children!

Yet even while he so reflected, he knew it could not be. Perfect means to perfect ends must be undeviating, unremitting, flawless—in a word, Inexorable.

It would be better for our teachers to tell us the truth, however, that there was no remission, no forgiveness, nor any other sloppy or lax methods of administration; to tell us that we must of our own will and strength pick up every one of our dropped stitches, retrace every step of our mistakes, blunder back as we have blundered from the path that leads to our salvation. Eternity is given wherein to do so, but each must work out his salvation for himself.

A cry from the adjoining room cut suddenly across the darkness, a high-pitched, horrid cry. He started up in bed, his skin bedewed. Heavens! what was happening? Had the madman overpowered his keeper in his sleep? Was the keeper maltreating the madman?

He lay listening for further sounds, for indication of what might be happening, of what he might be called upon to do.

All was silence again, however. He mopped his brows. A cry in a dream, no doubt! A worse sleeping dream even than the madman's waking one of murder! Here, again, what a horror! For some sin or ignorance, or mere misfortune of his own or of his forbears, here was a wretched creature doomed to live his life ridden by a brain so perverted as to show him homicide as the greatest good in it.

Why had Corry not told him the truth? he wondered irritably. Of all men he, so hypersensitive to his sur-

roundings, so prone to somber, morbid influences, was the last in the world to make his home with these flawed minds.

Nothing should induce him to remain. For decency's sake, since he had come, he would stop the week out, and would then escape. But whither?

He awoke to a profound silence—silence so profound as to make him suspect that the very strangeness of it had awakened him. For, Londoner as he was, silence was a beatitude to which he had long been a stranger. And in this silence were qualities of clarity and limpidness that seemed to wrap the mind as with an element. He lay steeping his senses in it, with a feeling of profound refreshment.

Presently he rose, and going to an opened window, looked out.

It was just before dawn. Above the dreaming world a clouded sky hung low and motionless, like the lax canopy of an ill-strung tent. And before him, with a dew-drenched lawn between, lay a wood—asleep. Not a sound stirred in it, all the creatures that do move by night having stealthily withdrawn before the imminent day; while the creatures that do move by day were still asleep.

It was late September, and the trees had shed their leaves. The ground was strewn with them as with delicate, discarded raiment.

For the most part the sleeping wood was a wonder of penciled line, depth on depth of marveled tracery, mysterious and intricate, trunk and bough and spreading branches, slender twigs and tender interlacing filaments. It showed like some rare Nature-screen, veiling sacred mysteries.

A student of men and of human complexities rather than of Nature, he scarcely knew his mighty mother in her simpler moods. And he was all at once filled with

surprise to find the notable and subtle beauty of this leafless wood. The leafless trees of London, seen in the beclouded light of London, smoke-begrimed and dingy, were black and flat as pen-and-ink sketches. These trunks and branches showed, on the contrary, a thousand delicate hues and tones, were soft and resilient with life, and the finer filaments made a thousand graceful patternings against the sky.

There were patches still of rich brown foliage upon the beeches, swathes of green where ivy climbed, but the leafless tracteries were beautiful enough alone to lure and charm the eye.

While he looked, the wood sighed, stirred—and awoke. There was a ripple in the cloud-canopy. A bird caroled sleepily from somewhere, then another and another, till the wood was all athrill with twittering sound. The day had come, and every humbler form of life was prattling praises for it. For they, obeying laws instead of breaking them, were cradled by them.

Malet, watching the color steal back to the face of the earth, as her dews dried and her mists folded their tents and traveled on, felt ashamed of his dark pessimisms of the night. Never before had he so realized the divine freshness and beauty of Nature as he did now, watching this dawn. In it he saw her calm and majestically tranquil, so vitally beautiful that he apprehended more than he had ever done the mighty unaffrighted heart with which she takes her great road.

His spirit recruited by the healing silence, he routed his dark vapors of the night. Even his mad neighbor he was able now to consider sanely. Disease and lunacy were gruesome facts, but they were consequences merely of our evil living. And the new science of Eugenics was upon their track. The breeding of a healthier and finer race was the way of the Millennium.

This being so, in the place of pusillanimously fleeing his poor brother, the more rational and humane thing

would be to send a substantial check that morning to the Eugenics Society, and so help to put a spoke in the wheel of degeneracy.

With which admirable resolution in view, he dressed and descended to breakfast.

Carry, very neat and very cold and very crisp, as some Englishwomen are at breakfast, making it seem incredible that they can have risen lately from a nest of warm recuperative sleep, was hovering actively about the breakfast table.

She gave him a chill hand and a stiff "Good morning!"

Then she returned to the table, moving this and that with deft fingers till all was to her taste. He was interested to see that although apparently superfluous, these finishing touches of hers were in truth artistic touches, and that by placing the bread-tray an inch to the right and the butter dish more to the left and so forth, she produced effects of design and of harmonious balance which pleasingly changed the whole aspect of things.

"Peter not down?" he asked. "Or is he visiting his patients?"

She set her last touch, moving a well-arranged bowl of asters nearer to the center, and so keying up the scheme.

Then she said, "No," laconically, letting it do duty for reply to both questions.

From what he had seen of Peter the previous evening, he might have answered the latter question for himself. Peter's sleekness was not bred of ante-breakfast industries.

"I hadn't known Peter was keeping a——"

"—A Mental Rest-Home," Mrs. Peter interposed quickly, as though to protect chaste ears from an abhorrent sound.

"A Mental Rest-Home," Malet echoed meekly, "until he told me last night. I thought he was in general practice."

Mrs. Peter glanced a slight disdain on general practice.

"Oh no," she said. "He began like that. But he could not have married on a general practice. I suggested the Mental Rest-Home. I knew somebody who did it, and made a great success of it."

"And Peter, too, is making a success of it," Malet said, smiling. "It was clever of you to think of it."

She looked so young and slim and ineffective, that few would have expected her to have evolved so hard-headed a notion.

"One has to think of things—for Peter," she replied, with a hint of thawing to the compliment.

"And you do not mind the—the patients? You do not feel nervous?"

Her round cold eyes grew rounder as they gazed at him.

"Good gracious, no," she said. "Why should I? They are all locked in."

In the face of her uncompromising unimaginativeness, Malet kept silence on his own imaginative dreads. Not for worlds would he have betrayed them to this calm young person, the convolutions of whose little brain might well have been of tempered steel.

"Some women," he said, "might feel nervous."

Her silence placed weaklings of this description beyond the pale.

Poor Malet, conscious of moods and sentiments in himself which had a way of getting out of hand, grew quite abased before her steel composure. He had heard it stated that Twentieth-Century young women were preternaturally level-headed, but this was surely an extreme example of the type.

Suddenly he saw a faint contraction of her mouth. A gleam lighted her slate-blue eyes. Her quick ears,



it seemed, had heard the approach of Corry; for he lounged in now, ruddy and sleek and smiling, bringing a wave of warmer atmosphere.

"Hullo, Uncle Chris!" he cried, extending a plump hand. "Hope I haven't kept you waiting breakfast. I find getting up no end of a beastly daily grind. I'm told all nice, comfortable people find the same. So I'm in good company. Any letters, Carry?"

Carry, with a firm mouth, put a sheaf of correspondence into his hands. Malet observed that all the envelopes had been opened.

"What's in them?" Peter questioned carelessly. "I say, what is there for breakfast?"

He laid the letters on the table, and ran an interested eye over the viands. "Anything else coming?"

"No," Carry said sharply. "There is quite enough."

"All right, old girl! Don't snap my head off. What shall I give you, Uncle? Eggs and bacon, kedgerree, cold ham, or salmi of partridge?"

Malet, having been helped to kedgerree, and Carry to eggs and bacon, Corry sat smiling before him, spoon and fork in hand.

"I can't make up my mind," he said, "whether to have cold ham—it looks ripping good!—or whether to have eggs and bacon. They *smell* ripping good. I say, Car, choose for me, there's a duck."

"No, you must choose for yourself. You expect me to be your brain and will and eyes and ears. And I decline to be."

Malet suggested kedgerree. "I can answer for its excellence," he said.

"I mean to—afterward. But I haven't room for three things in addition to honey. Well, here goes! since you won't give me any assistance, Carry. Beastly nasty of you not to. Cold ham it is, though that bacon smells uncommon tempting."

"Mr. Thackeray and Lady Sarah do not join us at breakfast?" Malet observed.

"Great Cæsar, no!" cried Corry, slicing ham. "We couldn't stand Rebecca Sharp and the cow story quite so early. A man must lay in provender before the day's grind. So I prescribe breakfast in bed for both of them. I say, Caroline, what's in all these letters? Anything important?"

"Yes. Mr. Cooper says we must put in that new boiler ourselves, because it is the new radiators we have fixed that make it necessary."

"Old skinflint! But I suppose we shall have to, although it will cost the very deuce. Anything else?"

"Read them for yourself."

"No, do just tell me—there's a brick. You know how I loathe letters. Do now—and you shall have a nice new bracelet or something when your next birthday comes round."

"Of course I shall have it, anyway. But you must read them for yourself. Old Mr. Thackeray writes. He is bringing Sir Henry Somebody to-day at twelve to see his son, and to decide finally whether an operation would be any good."

"Rot!" said Corry. "Of course it wouldn't, unless they could cut Becky Sharp out of it. And not the whole College of Surgeons could put a finger on the kink that she's in. Why can't they let well alone? I've done wonders for the poor chap. He's quite a different man since he came here. I just humor him," he told Malet. "It's no earthly use disputing with him as his people do, and trying to convince him that he isn't William Makepeace, and that he never wrote *Vanity Fair* and all the rest of it. His only interest in life is to believe he did, and that he is doing a great national work in proving Becky to have been a second Joan of Arc."

"Well, it's nothing but absurd vanity," Carry protested with contempt. "I don't wonder his people have no patience with him. I haven't, and it makes me

quite angry to hear the way you humor and flatter him, Peter. Some day I shall talk sense to him. I'm sure it would do him no end of good."

"That day we shall lose seven hundred a year," Corry stated quietly. "And you will have hurt the poor chap's feelings badly without doing his brain an ounce of good."

He read a letter languidly.

"They're coming by the 12.20, I see. Tell Hanson to meet them at the station with the brougham, Carry. And we must give them some lunch, of course. Champagne, Carry—second best. Old Thackeray doesn't know Pommery from cider, and Sir Henry's a teetotaller."

"If I shall be in the way——" Malet submitted.

"Certainly not. You must stop where you are. It may interest you to meet Sir Henry. He's not afraid of anything. He operates within an hour of death, if he's allowed to. Never too late, he thinks, to improve on nature and to slice off a bit here or a bit there from a chap's brain, and make another chap of him. He's nearly as clever as the Chinamen—thousand-and-one chops, you know, and his unfortunate victim still alive and kicking, if you call it being alive to be what people are when he's been at 'em. Death is decenter and kinder, I think. And if I can help it, Thackeray sha'n't have him hacking at his brain on the off-chance of hacking Becky out of it. The poor chap is harmless, and happy in his delusion that he is the great man."

"Happier, no doubt, than the great man himself was," Malet commented. "It's so much less wear and tear to alter her name to Rebecca with red ink than it was to create Becky in black."

Breakfast over. Malet repaired to his room to write letters.

"You won't forget to write to Lady Lygon about the mistake of the platform," Carry reminded him eagerly. "I should so hate her to think I suggested it to you."

## CHAPTER V.

LADY LYGON

**H**AVING written his letters, Malet went for a stroll in the grounds. These were extensive and pleasantly arranged. The house stood high, and commanded fine views and invigorating airs.

He walked till he was tired, then climbed a grassy slope, topped by an inviting-looking rustic shelter, facing south. He would sit here and enjoy a sun-bath, he reflected.

Some one had forestalled him, for as he closed the door behind him, Lady Sarah rose up from a corner and greeted him effusively.

"Good morning, Mr. Malet. You come at a seasonable moment. I have been practicing my will-power, and am quite fatigued, so I shall be glad of some small talk to rest my mind."

"How do you practice will-power without any one to influence?"

"I practice on the clouds. Have you never tried it? Then you shall try it now with me. Fix your eye upon that small cloud, over the cedar, and will with all your power that it shall disperse. If you concentrate sufficiently, you will find it slowly melt. Some days one isn't successful. This morning I have cleared away quite a number of clouds by the force of my will."

Malet, fixing his eyes, found that small clouds thus observed did indeed slowly melt as she described. He

knew, however, that not the concentration of his will but atmospheric conditions were the cause of the phenomenon.

Tiring, "Now, let us talk," she said. "Sit near, but not too near to me. Set the front legs of your chair on those two roses of the linoleum. We shall then be exactly within the zone of sympathy. You are interested, I am sure, in the occult."

Her small peaked face, narrow-browed and high-nosed, with faded blue eyes, at the same time keen and wandering, was set beneath the shadow of a wide-brimmed hat with black lace falling over her scant silver hair. She wore a dress of shabby violet velvet, obsolete of style, a green embroidered bolero, a scarf of pale blue crêpe, and an old sable muff. Yet despite her incongruous garments and her odd manner, she had an air of breeding, and spoke with a fine articulation which betokened generations of good stock. Of this good stock, however, the form and lineaments had been preserved while the intelligence had waned. Her vacant, high-bred features suggested a delicately graven cameo, with the powers that once had tenanted the shell almost extinct.

Malet replying with due seriousness that he was interested in the occult, she gave a little peal of foolish laughter, which, of his sympathy, he found pathetic.

"There now, I knew it!" she cried, a note of triumph in her thin voice. "The moment you came within the zone of sympathy, I knew that you and I were of the same affinity."

She glanced about her with an air of caution, then dropping her voice, she said in a confidential undertone, "Nobody at 'Roseberry' cares in the least for the occult. *He* is very kind and lively, and *she* is quite obliging, but they are both still earth-bound, and care only for the things of matter. I may tell you in confidence that I intended leaving here to-morrow by an afternoon train, if you had not been coming."

"It was a lucky chance that brought me, then."

She raised and crooked a withered forefinger.

"Nothing is chance," she stated solemnly. "All is foreordained. I saw your coming last week in the crystal—a tall dark man with a gift in his hands. I could not make out what the gift was. It looked like a jewel-box, and I thought of a ruby necklet that belonged to my mother, and to which I am greatly attached. My sister-in-law keeps it from me with some other of my jewels. But I thought she had perhaps repented, and was sending it back to me by this tall dark man who was clearly bearing a gift. Have you brought it?"

He regretted that he had not.

"It isn't of the slightest consequence," she observed graciously. "Some day it will come. I merely made an error in interpretation. You are the tall dark man, not with the gift of my necklace but with the gift of writing books. The crystal never deceives. It is only our own misinterpretations that mislead us. It is all very wonderful, is it not?"

"Extraordinary!" he said.

She turned her head, and peered into his eyes. She shook her delicate white face. Stealing out a withered hand, she laid it gently upon one of his. A curious exalted look lighted her features.

"There is sorrow about you," she said dreamily—"sorrow and shame and loss. Your aura is dark and troubled. But it will pass. The clouds are breaking. Peace and rest are coming to you: peace and beautiful friendship. Cast the past behind you. Throw off the darkness and grief. When darkness and grief are the guests of a human habitation they attract further darkness and grief. Cast them behind you, and look up to the light."

Her eyes fell dull, her face blank. She drew her scarf about her with thin trembling hands.

"How very cold it is!" she protested querulously. "What was I saying? Oh, I remember. He is very kind and lively, and she is quite obliging; but they are both earth-bound—earth-bound. I find no sustenance here for the spirit. . . . But I think I will go in. I feel fatigued and cold."

She rose, weak and trembling, her face blanched.

"We see as in a glass, darkly, darkly, but beyond is light—is light," she muttered low.

Malet rose too, and taking her arm, drew it within his own.

"We will go together," he said gently.

Her rudderless mind veered again. She laughed her vacant laugh.

"Let us go through the shrubbery," she counseled, "or we might be seen. And mother will scold. She calls you a sad detrimental, Robert."

Halfway to the house, they were met by her maid, a placid-looking middle-aged person.

"I was just coming to look for you, my lady," she said. "Your soup is ready."

"Ann," she questioned solemnly, "are you sure there is no milk in it?"

The assurance given, she bowed ceremoniously to Malet, and went on to the house.

Returning to the shelter, he reflected on the pathos of this wrecked mind in which the central intelligence, deposed from its control, wandered hither and thither, a flickering will-o'-the-wisp, now flashing its feeble light in this and now in that dilapidated chamber of the consciousness.

That was a singular gleam which had shown him to her as the subject of sorrow and shame! Or was it mere inconsequent babble? He knew, however, that a rift in the brain sometimes lets in strange light—light which the normal solidarity of the faculties excludes. What was it she had promised him? "Peace and rest and

beautiful friendship." He smiled grimly, Corry's or Carry's?

Returning to the house, the butler met him on the threshold with a large square envelope.

"From Travenhoe, sir," he said with some impressiveness. "A footman brought it a few minutes ago."

Carry, standing at the top of the staircase, fixed expectant eyes upon the missive as he gained her level.

"Has she forgiven you?" Then as he showed perplexity, "The note is from Lady Lygon" she added impatiently.

"Why, I have not opened it." Perceiving her interest he did so.

Had the note been other than it was, seeing her interest in it, he would have given it to her to read. Being what it was, he refolded and replaced it in its envelope.

"She hasn't forgiven you!" Carry cried fiercely. "Oh, what an unfortunate, annoying thing to have happened just when she was beginning to be friendly."

Malet reassured her.

"She makes nothing at all of it," he said. "She writes most kindly. She asks me to call, in fact."

"To call? Lady Lygon asks you to call at Travenhoe? But doesn't she mention me? Are you sure she says nothing about me?"

Her eyes still clung about the letter.

"Why, no," he said, the truth compelling him. "You see it was I who trespassed and apologized."

"And she really asks you to call?"

Her persistent eagerness made it a discourtesy on his part to withhold the letter. But a scruple of honor moved him to do so, there being that in it which was meant for his eyes only.

"She asks me to drink tea with her this afternoon," he said, and went on to his room.

There he re-read the note.



"DEAR MR. MALET,—

"You were and will always be welcome to use our little station. Pray do not feel at all guilty about it. I quite understand.

"Do you know, it has given me so much pleasure to receive a note from you. Your books have charmed many a dull hour for me, and have cheered sad ones. I have wished many times to meet you, feeling a friend in the author of *Calliope*. And now fate sends you to Foxgate, and sends you at the right moment, if you will be good enough to give me your counsel in a difficult crisis of my life.

"Can you spare time to come to tea with me this afternoon at four, or later, if a later hour will better suit your plans?

"Yours sincerely,  
"MONICA LYGON."

She wrote a pleasing hand, firm and clear and delicate. Nevertheless, he detected stress and agitation in it. He gathered that it was no slight matter upon which she wished his counsel. Re-reading it, he was glad he had not yielded to Carry's persistence. The note was clearly intended for himself alone.

He wrote accepting her invitation, and expressing the happiness he would feel to be of service to her. There being time to do this before luncheon, he himself left it at Travenhoe.

A Queen Anne house, massive and stately, he knew it for one stored with famous old masters—Reynolds and Gainsboroughs and Wissings—and other treasures of art and history. To his interest in making the acquaintance of its mistress, whose cold, rebellious face he had seen as a human document, there was added the anticipation of reviewing an historic interior and famous art treasures.

Sir Henry did not remain to luncheon, having to see

another patient in the neighborhood, thus, as Corry put it dryly, "killing two birds with one stone."

"He did his best, at all events, to kill my bird," he added; "but I was diplomatic, and lay low till he had gone. And then I brought all my power to bear on old Thackeray to let well alone and forbid any operation. The old chap is devoted to his son, and was rather relieved by my advice. He spends one day a week here with him, and thinks him, except for that little kink about his identity, nearly as great a genius as he thinks himself."

Travenhoe was one only, and not the finest, of Lord Lygon's places, but it was his wife's favorite. Here, whensoever she could escape from her duties in town or elsewhere, she came with her only child, the boy whom Malet had seen with her at the station. And here she and he led the simplest of lives with her books and in her garden.

Gossip said she came here because Lygon seldom did so. For as Malet had gleaned from some talk at his Club, they were a disaffected couple, Lygon's affections having been for some years devoted to the beautiful Mrs. Ferrers, the most noted beauty and wit of her day, and—incidentally—a widow.

Of Lady Lygon herself gossip found nothing worse to say than that she was a fool, under the circumstances of her husband's infatuation elsewhere, to give it nothing worse to say. For howsoever admirable the world finds virtue in the abstract, the world of fashion finds it in the flesh unsympathetic and uninteresting; and, further, a reproach to those whose code is more accommodating—a contingent by no means small.

And this was one of the reasons perhaps why Lady Lygon escaped whensoever she was able from that world of fashion which found her unsympathetic, to bury herself in her beautiful gardens at Travenhoe.

Malet, calling, followed a handsomely liveried footman through corridors, at the same time rich and somber from their stained-glass windows, and was ushered into an elegant boudoir.

The walls were paneled with brocade of a soft cloud-gray, while the curtains and furnishings were of that fine shape of blue which Hoppner has immortalized. Some rare old color-prints and a few bronzes were the only adornments. The effect of the room was at once chaste and gay: the room, he reflected—if she had had any part in its appointments—of a woman of culture and taste.

Its three ovoid windows overlooked an Italian garden, with rose pergolas, marble terraces, sunken lawns and classic statuary; and beyond this a stretch of park with stately trees, and a broad avenue leading to an arena of sky whereon the setting sun might frequently be seen to fight a blood-red battle with the invader night, only to die again, alas! in crimson glory.

"Ah, these rich—these rich!" Malet reflected with a half-sigh. "How they understand the art of living, and have arrogated to themselves the means of doing so in the most advantageous settings!"

The door opened, and there entered a woman who, though mistress of all these privileges, had no air of having turned them to account. A lovely woman, Malet reflected, had not her face been marred by coldness and signs of conflict which were unsympathetic and unpleasing.

Indeed, despite her finely modeled features and her rich complexion, her expression so marred her that Malet would not perhaps have realized that she was beautiful had not the boy who entered with her given him the keynote to her face. For, allowing for differences of age, of sex, and of coloring, the boy being fair while she was dark, it was the same face shown irradiate with warmth and happiness.

He was the most beautiful boy Malet had ever seen in life or picture, his frame and limbs splendidly proportioned, the head nobly shaped and intellectual, with a kink of ardor and energy in the gold-brown hair, his blue eyes clear and lustrous with health and brimming with intelligence, his lips full and curved but firm, and upon them a smile of joyous expectancy, as of one looking forward, as youth should look, to the great thing which life seemed to him.

He suggested Ganymede or some other divine youth of story, the scion of a Golden Age, a new human type, the epitome of all the ages past and the forerunner of a race to be—a race to lead us to new Golden Ages.

Malet, his wonder outrunning his manners, forgot all else in staring at him.

The proud mother, interpreting his flattering surprise, an emotion to which she must have grown accustomed, allowed him an interval wherein to admire her unique boy. Then, moving forward, she laid a delicate jeweled hand in his.

"I am glad you could come," she said. "This is my boy, Cyril. Cyril, I read you a chapter of Mr. Malet's book, *Calliope*."

The boy thrust a thrilling hand into the visitor's.

"I didn't understand it all, sir," he said, with a frank joyous laugh. "Mother expects every one to be as clever as she is. I hope I shall be when I grow up."

"Are you making a long visit here?" she asked, with no other comment on her boy's praise than a smile so fond that breaking up the coldness of her face, for a moment this approximated his in beauty.

Malet, who had been doubting all day whether the melancholy sense of being neighbored by Corry's flawed humanities, added to Corry's distaste for his society, would make up for the seclusion he might count upon at "Roseberry," answered dubiously that his plans were uncertain, that his plans were not yet made.

Her face fell a little.

"I had hoped you might have been remaining for some time," she said. "There is so much in your books I should have enjoyed talking over with you."

In conversation her coldness passed in animation, and her rebellious face softened. As is frequently the case with reserved persons, her smile was charming.

Corry's madmen and Carry's aversions withdrew into the background.

"But I hope to be here for some time," he said. "And I hope certainly that you will allow me the privilege of explaining anything that may have puzzled you."

"Mother thinks no end of you, sir," Cyril put in with engaging ingenuousness. "She reads your books over and over again, and praises them no end to people. I've heard her."

Lady Lygon smiled composedly, pouring tea from a magnificent old Queen Anne teapot into the Sèvres cups Malet considered too exquisite for any more onerous rôle than to exist upon a velvet shelf, fast locked behind glass doors.

"Now, Cyril," she said, when the boy had passed her guest's cup and had otherwise ministered to him, "now that you have seen Mr. Malet, you may go back to your friends and give them tea."

The boy's ingenuous countenance fell. From his expression and the searching glances with which he had been studying the stranger, it was plain that this was the first maker of books he had met, and that he had not yet satisfied his interest concerning the species.

"Oh, must I?" he said with reluctance. "Oh, I must, of course," he added quickly, at a glance from her. "Good-by, Mr. Malet. I think it's wonderful to write books. Do you print them with your own hands?"

Malet laughed before the candor of his blue eyes. He thought he had never before seen anything so engaging as the vital innocence and freshness of this young life.

For in our prosaic age boys—and, for that matter, girls—are but seldom beautiful.

"What a handsome fellow!" he said, when the boy had gone.

With his departure, all the kindled light and glow faded from his mother's face. Again she was cold and remote.

"He is leaving me soon"—her voice was blank—"he is going to Eton."

Tea finished, she changed her chair for one beside the fire. There, with her face in shadow and slightly averted, she said:

"I gather from your books that you do not approve of Public Schools for boys, of schools at all for children."

"No. I think the environment in which a child is born is clearly the best for it to be brought up in. It seems to me that young powers and faculties are like buds, and need a fostering and nurturing atmosphere for their development. The atmosphere of home supplies such a developing influence. Institution life—school life is institution life, of course—nips such buds of promise, stifles individuality, and makes for commonplaceness."

"It is a friendless, desolate life for a young tender creature," she said in a smothered voice. "A boy needs his mother to guide him, to influence him, to shield and befriend him."

There was a long silence. In his impressionability, he was aware of her fighting pain and anger.

"Some schools are very much better than some mothers," he submitted. "We must not forget that. There are women who spoil their children by harshness or by indulgence or by neglect."

"And yet, I wonder," she said quickly, "whether the personal influence, even if it is not all that it might be, is not better for their development than the cold and deadening rule of what you call institution life."

"Perhaps so. A child that is home-made, even though made by clumsy hands, has a living flesh-and-blood quality about it that the machine-made, school-milled child, turned out by the gross, lacks."

She said tensely :

"They are cruel and unjust—these laws that make the child belong to the father, that give the mother no right in him to decide his fate."

"But surely, if Lord Lygon were to know you feel so strongly about it——"

She threw out her hands.

"Men do not think for themselves. They are so conventional, so conservative. They take their opinions from the Clubs. One can't change them, can't move them. And they support one another so loyally in their conformity that it is one woman against a whole world of men."

"I beg you not to take it so to heart. Of course you must miss the boy sadly. But although I myself think the system bad, there is no doubt the schools turn out some excellent fellows, in spite of the drawbacks."

"Oh, I want my boy to have every advantage, and no drawbacks from which he can be saved. I want him to be a good man, to do great work, perhaps, in this unhappy, wicked world."

"It isn't that," he said. "Believe me, taking it all round, the world is decent and well-intentioned, and, on the whole, well-behaved. And believe me, too, the son of a mother who has hoped and thought great things for him, never goes far wrong. He may make mistakes—to make mistakes is the human and the only way of finding the right road for oneself—but the son of a good woman always comes right in the end. This, I gather, is what you wished to speak to me about. I wish I could help you. But since, as it seems, he must go to school, I can only beg you not to be over-anxious, to

trust to the boy's own natural goodness and talent to win through in spite of drawbacks."

There was a pause. Then she said, in a low, clear voice:

"No. It was not about Cyril I wished to speak to you. His father has decided positively that he must go to school."

There was another and a longer silence. He guessed from the restless locking and unlocking of her hands that she was battling with her reserves before she could bring herself to say more.

Then she said, in the same low voice:

"You will think it extraordinary that I should consult a stranger on my intimate affairs, but from your books I have thought that you know human nature well and are wise and sympathetic, and take broad and independent views of things. Even if I could bring myself to tell my difficulties, there is nobody among my friends to give me any but worldly advice. And I want very much to do the right and the true thing, not merely the expedient one."

Again she paused.

"Since women have begun to think, all life has changed. And more especially the relation between the sexes has changed. Fifty years ago, tolerance and meek submission seem to have been high virtues in my sex. To-day we have changed all that. To-day, the rôle of the complaisant wife—complaisant and . . . neglected" (how her pride fought with the word!) "is mean-spirited and unworthy. And yet," she shivered through all her delicate frame, "how one shrinks from a public exposure!"

"It is detestable," he said. "As you must know, I have myself just passed through the ordeal."

"You? But I did not know—I had no notion——"

"The papers have been filled with it."

"I do not read them carefully. I am so very sorry



to have trespassed on your trouble. I knew nothing of it. I had thought of you as a student of life and of people—an onlooker rather than a partaker."

"Oh, well, my story is common property. I dissolved my marriage yesterday."

"I am so very sorry," she said again. "I must not, of course, vex you with my distress since you have distresses of your own."

He smiled.

"Do," he urged, "if I can be of use to you. For now I am able to add personal experience to theory."

She looked at him with wonder.

"And even you, with your understanding of women, could have chosen the wrong one for wife."

"The 'wrong ones' have the advantage of being a majority since they are the rule, and the right one—the exception."

Briefly he told her his case.

"But how ungrateful of her!"

He shrugged a shoulder.

"You approve, then, of divorce?" she asked.

"Certainly, since it is the only way out of unhappy and uncongenial marriages. Whether I approve of indissoluble marriage is quite another thing. That the life-happiness and development of a man and a woman should be blighted because they have married one another in a silly fit of boy-and-girl sentiment, knowing nothing of life, of character, or of the qualities they need to supplement their own, is deplorable. Seventy per cent. of early marriages are such fatal blunders that it is a cruelty to the individual and a crime against the race that they should be irremediable. And yet marriage is a thing so sacred, and has worked so well for all these centuries, that it is no wonder we hesitate about innovations."

"It is intolerable for a woman to be bound to a man who does not care for her."

‘It is worse for a woman to be bound to a man she does not care for.’

He saw the nostril of her half-averted face dilate and quiver.

“But—when he publishes his indifference to all the world——!”

“That is no reflection on a woman’s worth or charm. Love and affinity are the most inexplicable factors in existence. The most beautiful and noble women have been neglected for worthless and mindless ones.”

“But she is none of these things.”

Now the personal note broke cover. Have done with generalities and moralizing! Here was her own case smoldering at her heart.

Now that the conversation trenched on delicate ground, he was silent. Speech had become difficult.

She spoke first. Her voice was hard again.

“It is mortifying to confide one’s affairs to a stranger—to any one indeed. But as I say, I feel that you are wise and kind, and a priest as it were of the creed of the heart, and if you will advise me I should greatly prize your counsel. . . . I have reached my limits of endurance. My life is impossible. My husband and I have been strangers for the last twelve years—since Cyril was born. And I had borne and made the best of it. But now, for three whole years, he has been devoted, and has made no secret of his devotion, to another woman. The position has become intolerable.

“Everybody knows of it. You know how things are in the present state of society. The tie is recognized, is tolerated, is fostered. House-parties that include him include her, otherwise they would include neither. Under such circumstances the wife is laughed at or pitied. . . . So long as I have had Cyril with me, there has been a reason for tolerating it. Now he is to be taken from me—for a boy ceases to belong to his mother when he goes to school—there is no further reason for

me to bear it. The relation of husband and wife is difficult even when they care for one another. When they do not, the closeness of the bond makes it intolerable.

"All these years I have borne it. I have lived in his houses, have entertained his guests—Not her," she interrupted tensely. "I have never descended to that. And this is now a cause of anger between us. Because she is always urging him (I am convinced) to force me to receive her. She is popular and beautiful and clever, and goes everywhere. And she feels it—I mean her to feel it—a reflection on her that I will not receive her in my house.

"And now she is doing her best to compel me to invite her here—to Travenhoe—where we passed our honeymoon, where Cyril was born, where Cyril and I have spent our happiest days. The place has been my refuge, my abode of peace. I love every stone of it, every tree and shrub. It is away from the world, and there is little chance of meeting her here. I am convinced she wishes so to anger me, so to cause an open rupture between my husband and me, that I shall divorce him, and she may marry him."

"You are sure, I suppose, that—you have a case against her?"

She made a rapid movement of her hands.

"Oh, I know my world!" she cried bitterly. "My husband is—a man. And she is a wicked woman. She lives only to make slaves of men. I believe it is she who has had the final word in sending Cyril from me. My husband had half promised that the boy should be a day-scholar, should live here and motor to Eton every day. She knows, of course, that he is the last tie between us, the one consideration that has kept me in bondage all these years."

"But, of course, she may not have plotted all these things."

She broke out tensely :

"I am convinced she has. And now she will have her way in everything. I received this morning from my husband a list of guests he wishes me to ask for next month, . . . and her name is among them. He is determined she shall come. He says that if for any reason I prefer to be absent, his sister, Lady Nora Clarges, will take my place as hostess. It is quite a new attitude. Always before he has treated me with consideration. Now there is open war. . . .

"I am so tired of it all that I will make an end of it. One deteriorates horribly, living tortured, depressed. I have written to him to make arrangements as he pleases; that I am going to Cannes—we have a villa there. I have written to my lawyer to come here to-morrow. And now I wished for your advice as to whether it would not be more just and generous . . . in all ways better for him, if I were to give him absolute release—not merely to leave him. If I release him, he will be free to marry her. And it will justify him . . . will set him right with people."

In the great issues involved, the armor of coldness in which jealousy and pride had encased her, slipped off. In the wistful pallor of her face and in the tragic shining of her dark eyes, he read her secret. In spite of everything she loved her husband: loved him with a passion so large-hearted that, forgetting her wrongs, the divorce she proposed was far more for his sake than it was for hers. While he would retain everything, and would, further, gain the object of his infatuation, she would lose all—possessions, rank, and the possibility of one day regaining him.

This new knowledge made Malet very sorry for her. The glimpse he caught of a generous but tortured heart enlisted all his sympathies.

He asked himself whether a woman of the clever mind and fine character he saw within her coldness would be likely to care for the mere pleasure-loving man

of fashion he had been taking it for granted Lygon was. For he knew nothing more of him than he had learned from scraps of gossip lightly heard and as lightly forgotten in the Clubs.

Men were—as they were! Despite his infatuation, which seemed at all events to possess the virtue of constancy, this one might be worthy of his wife's affection, might be worth a struggle to regain.

He forgot that she had asked him a momentous question and himself asked her a question apparently irrelevant.

"Did Lord Lygon love you when you were first married, Lady Lygon?"

It was so unexpected and seemed to her to be so inconsequent that she needed to readjust her thoughts before replying.

Then she answered with conviction:

"No. Young as I was and ignorant, I discovered before we had been married a month that he had never loved me. It was important that he should marry. His cousin and heir-apparent—but you must know the story, a mortifying one. He was in prison for some fraud; there was bad blood in him—his mother had been a chorus girl—and it was always breaking out. He was, and is, quite impossible. It was not to be thought of that he should inherit. . . . And I was one of the *débutantes* of the season his cousin was sentenced!"

"It is magnanimous of you to consider his point of view instead of your own."

She made a little gesture of protest.

"Oh, I!" she said. She smiled bitterly. "I have seen enough of life to know how very little women get from it."

"And yet you are one of the women with great capacities for happiness."

"Perhaps!" she assented dully, as though she had ceased to be interested in herself.

"It is a question, then, of whether you will divorce Lord Lygon, or will leave him without appealing to the law?"

"Yes. The half-measure is odious and harassing. And he is one of the men who are fond of home, one whose happiness depends upon a woman—upon . . . a wife."

"If I knew Lord Lygon and understood his character, I should be more in a position to advise you," Malet said compunctiously. "Because not what a man does, but what a man is, is the key to every situation in which he is found."

"Oh, do you think that?" she asked quickly. She sat in thought. Then she said:

"It had seemed to me that the situation in which he is found is the key to a man's character."

"No. There are only a few—comparatively a few—situations in life, a few moves on the board. Any man may make a false one. It is motive and point-of-view that make up the infinite varieties and complexities of human problems, and that make every problem stand on its own merits."

She leaned forward and pressed a bell-push.

"Bring me that photograph of his lordship that is in the library," she bade the servant who came.

He returned with a silver-framed portrait.

Malet studied it attentively. Then meeting her eyes, which he found fixed upon him with an eager pride in the subject of his study, he said gravely:

"Lady Lygon, if I know anything of character, this is too good and too sound a man for a good woman to forego without a struggle. Has it never occurred to you that in the fight a man like this"—he tapped the portrait—"wages with temptation, the good woman lets him go with scarcely an effort to retain him, while the bad one grips him with grappling irons?"

"One cannot tussle for possession of a man."

"True! A woman gains nothing but her own and his contempt by tussling. But since you ask me to advise you, I owe it to you to speak frankly. And I tell you frankly, that in order that beauty and talent and charm—good quality of any sort—should be secured to the race, Nature has made men particularly susceptible to these things, and in consequence a more or less easy victim of the other sex. One can't get away from basic facts. The aberrations of some men are merely viciousness, but those of others are the outcome of a restless seeking after the true mate.

"Such men are sincerely unhappy when they find that a woman they have mistaken for the true affinity is only another will-o'-the-wisp. Good women do not reckon with, or find no excuse for, all this, because their own temperament contains nothing quite similar. The women who reckon with it do their best to delude the man into mistaking them for an affinity. And when he discovers, as he does sooner or later, that here is only another will-o'-the-wisp, they cry out upon him for a base deceiver. In point of fact he has been the deceived, because women are as vastly more true of instinct about love and mating as they are vastly less susceptible to the factor of mere sex."

"I was no will-o'-the-wisp," she said bitterly. "I neither deceived him, nor did he deceive himself. He never loved me, never understood me in the least."

"That is just where hope comes in."

"Hope?"

"Why, yes. For we may hope that this lady is only a will-o'-the-wisp."

"Does the light of a will-o'-the-wisp last so long as three whole years?"

"Oh yes. Provided conditions have not made for disillusion."

"In that case, then, I may have another rival," she submitted, with the same bitterness. "I find no comfort

in the notion, Mr. Malet. On the contrary, my husband's constancy to Mrs. Ferrers has seemed to me to be a redeeming note."

Malet turned kind, grave eyes upon her.

"But suppose you, after all, are your husband's true affinity. And suppose he should come to discover it? You say he has never understood you—suppose he should come to understand and to care for you?"

She cried out sharply. There were pain and reproach in her voice.

"How can I suppose a thing so impossible? I have been his wife for twelve whole years. If he had cared to understand me, if there had been a thread of affinity between us——! Mr. Malet, I beg you to say no more of this. It is painful beyond words. Oh, I did not think of inviting so mortifying a suggestion."

"Dear lady, I am sorry to have hurt you; but if you call in a surgeon, whether for the mind or for the body, his probe may cause some smarting. That goes without saying, if he is to come at the source of the trouble. Remember you have put a grave responsibility upon me. With only the slightest knowledge of the facts, you ask me to help you in the most momentous decision of a woman's life. On this slight knowledge, however, I say emphatically, that you are too good and too clever a woman to allow yourself to drop out of the running, and to be lost from an important sphere of influence and possible happiness. From Lord Lygon's portrait—it is probably flattering——"

"Oh, not at all," she protested. He found her wifely indignation and heat of voice pathetic.

"Not flattering," he acquiesced with a faint smile. "The more reason then for me to insist that he is too good a man to be let slip into the hands of the Philistines without an effort to save him."

She said, with a catch in her voice:

"Mr. Malet, you are really most extraordinary. When



I asked your counsel, I never for a moment expected you to take this amazing view of things!"

"Yet you told me you did not wish for a merely conventional view. I am doing my best to set the case in what appears to me to be a broad and human light. Had you been an ordinary woman and Lord Lygon an ordinary man, I might have thought the ordinary code quite good enough. But you are both exceptional. If, now, you could forgive him——"

"I cannot, of course," she cried, her face flooding with crimson. "Love and marriage are too sacred to be treated lightly."

He spread his hands.

"Human things and human beings are imperfect. And the greater are so jumbled with the lesser that we can only make the best of them. And remember, the fine things in life are very fine indeed."

"I will not have it. Were he to come to me to-morrow and tell me he had given her up for ever, I could never forgive him. I cannot be happy with flawed happiness."

"But if he were to come to you and say, 'I have been mad. I have been a fool and worse. For three years, with the best beside me, I have followed a will-o'-the-wisp. You are the only woman in the world for me'——"

"It would do in a book. But he is not at all like that. He is of the world, clever and pleasure-loving, and not at all romantic. And even if such an impossible thing were to be, I could not forgive him. My pride, my affection——"

"Suppose he had been thrown, out hunting, and were disabled, would you cast him off?"

"No, no. Of course not. One might care even more for him. But that would have been a mere accident, something he could not have helped."

"A physical instead of a temperamental disability. Life is a jumble of disabilities. Who seeks his or her story,

free of such and unspotted from the world must live in a monk's cell."

"Then I will do that," she said. "But I will not fight with another woman for possession of my husband. But because he is my husband and Cyril's father, I want to do the right thing, and the thing that is best for him. And I am sure this is to set him absolutely free."

Having been constituted her counsel, Malet now found himself fighting her case against herself. For he saw that the thing she proposed meant the utter devastation of her life. Moreover, student of life as he was, he knew that such a love as hers, could it but find response, might be the redemption of such a man.

"Of course," he urged, "you may have no grounds for releasing him. From what I have heard in the Clubs, Mrs. Ferrers, in spite of her train of admirers, has an impeccable record."

Before she had time to reply, a servant entered.

"My lady," he said, "his lordship is just motoring into the park."

With the opening of the door, she slipped on her armor again. She was once more the cold, rebellious woman Malet had seen at the station. She bent an impassive head to her servant's intelligence. But Malet saw that her hands were trembling, and no sooner had the man gone than, forgetting all else, she moved swiftly to a window, and standing behind a curtain fixed her gaze eagerly on that part of the grounds where a curve of the drive came in view.

Then pride regained the mastery. As suddenly as she had sped there, she now coldly returned to her chair.

Malet rose.

"Don't go," she said quickly. "I should like you to meet my husband. You will then be able to judge him for yourself."

## CHAPTER VI

### LORD LYGON

**I**T was some time before Lord Lygon came. As such expectant minutes do, these dragged, and some talk about books into which they dropped went rather haltingly.

He saw that she was employing the interval to school her face, her voice, her trembling hands. He could not decide whether this was her habitual preparation for her husband, or whether she was armoring herself in view of the crisis between them. But all he had guessed of the hostility she employed as shield for her affection, he now saw had been true. Such a chill, accusing countenance and bearing as she had summoned by the time Lygon came would be as potent barriers to the reconciliation he suggested as, he could not doubt, they had been potent in their alienation.

When he came, Malet laughed in his sleeve, remembering her indignant protest that his portrait did not flatter him. For after the manner of photographs, it certainly did this. Good-looking as he was, he was far from being the Adonis his picture made of him. He was, nevertheless, quite as good-looking as a man need be in a day when good-looking men are rare.

It was not his tall, well-proportioned figure, however, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and narrow-loined, his clean-shaven, strong-featured face and well-balanced if materialistic head, that Malet's eyes first secured as an asset to his credit side, but something beyond these.

Many men of his set, fine physical types though they

are, present an appearance of having been so over-civilized as to have sacrificed their individuality in too close a conformity to social and purely artificial standards. They are as efficient, as polished, and as calculable as are fine steel mechanisms, but they are more mechanism than they are man. So closely, indeed, they resemble one another in speech and thought and action as to show like members of a large aristocratic family, once great and powerful but slightly decadent from generations of in-breeding. For in-breeding is of two sorts: breeding from the same hereditary stock, and breeding from the same acquired characteristics.

There was, however, in Lygon's eye a far-reaching flash, in his movements an ardor and vigor as of power held in check, which were wholly different from the tame and rather tired, or the wiry automatism of those others. One saw that, when aroused, he would act independently, straight from his own brain or heart, and in a way that could not be forecast.

Seeing the two together, and seeing them, as he had told the wife, as two exceptional persons, they seemed to Malet to be an ideal and admirably mated couple, despite the fact that their relations had become jangled.

There was temper between them, however, temper and strained feeling; and temper, like grit, will spoil the running of the finest mechanism—spoil it all the more, indeed, in proportion as it is fine.

A man of his spirit must, he knew, find it intolerable to pass his life in the attitude, part abasement, part defiance, which fell upon him the moment his glance met his wife's.

All the light had fled her eyes; her mouth was hard; her voice and movements lost all warmth and spontaneity. It was as though with his coming she wilfully locked away all that was charming and endearing in her.

Entering with sparks of combat in his eyes, he seemed annoyed, and yet relieved, to find a stranger present:

annoyed, because he had come down to have out his battle with her, that question of her flight from Mrs. Ferrers; relieved, because the battle was an odious thing deferred.

The two flung words of recognition one to the other as though casting gauntlets.

Then Lady Lygon said:

"Mr. Malet—Lord Lygon. You know Mr. Malet's books, Morant."

So toneless and banal her voice was that Malet felt himself insignificant, presented in it.

Lygon shook his hand in cool but pleasant fashion.

"Yours are some of the few novels I can read," he said. "Your people are real, and you don't smother them with cheap sentiment."

"I try not to do so," Malet answered smiling, and taking a sudden liking to him for his quick, rapier-like glance that flashed beyond a man's face to find his quality. "But it costs me something a year. The great number of novel-readers, and even some of those hard-headed chaps the reviewers, prefer false sentiment to true, because it is prettier."

He saw that Lygon's mind had wandered, guessed that it had wandered to the coming struggle with his wife. His eyes were on her coldly averted face, searching it, challenging it.

But as the actor, without listening to the speech preceding his, takes his cue from some word of it, and the man of the world, another sort of actor, frequently, without listening to his companion's speech, takes his cue from the ceasing of his voice, he now said smoothly, the moment Malet finished,

"We owe you writers something for enlivening dull hours for us. But gad! what frightfully dull times you must have yourselves, sitting all the while with pens in your hands!"

"We scarcely live at all. We merely look on and de-

scribe others living. All the world's a stage to us, and men and women mainly players. And in life it is the actors who most enjoy the play."

"That depends, surely, on whether the play is enjoyable," Lady Lygon said caustically.

The causticity was forced. She overdid it. But though she failed to be convincing, she succeeded in being disagreeable.

Lygon vouchsafed neither sign nor reply, however. And Malet took this for an example of his customary bearing toward her. While she did not directly reproach him, he did not directly attack her. Their life was a scene of perpetually veiled skirmishes. He whipped her by his fondness for another, she whipped him by her coldness, by the hard, unhappy face with which she shamed him to the world, and by her seeming high indifference.

"I think not," Malet now objected. "It is enjoyment to feel and to act—to live and to drink deeply of life."

"Even to the dregs?"

Now her husband winced. For the whip this time had struck beyond him, and struck at that other. To Malet's eyes he had no look of a man who was drinking of dregs. But he knew that in this particular wives were unjust, and were unable to believe the straying husband was not lured solely by the base.

"Are you making a visit of any length?" Lygon asked, changing the subject abruptly. "If so, look us up, will you, when you can spare a little time from merely looking on."

Malet expressed pleasure.

"They've just 'made me M.F.H. here—the Quillom Hunt, you know—so I expect to be down a good deal this winter. Legions of foxes this season, they tell me—but they always say that. Anyhow, I can promise you some rippin' runs in return for pleasant hours I've

had between your covers." He added genially: "I can lend you a mount when you care to follow."

Malet smiled.

"You are very kind, but I have never been on horseback in my life."

"God bless my soul!" was all the other found to say, and said it in manifest surprise that an intelligent man should live to tell a tale so dolorous.

"I could not afford to ride till I was too old to acquire new habits," Malet explained simply.

"Rippin' shame!"

"Oh, not at all. I have been as happy without hunting and some other things as you perhaps would have been unhappy without them."

"Why, man, you've never lived till you've come pelt-ing over the fields, on a moist gray day with the hounds in full cry and now and again the red streak of a brush from a cover, or the flash of a red rascal in the open. You've no notion what you've missed in life, I tell you."

"Ah," Malet said drily. "Compared with a bright frosty morning, a snap in your mind, a stretch of blank paper, and a favorite pen, your thoughts in full cry after an exciting plot or character that now flashes, now vanishes, among the convolutions of your brain, to my mind fox-hunting isn't in it."

Lygon laughed, upon his lids a twinkle of disparagement, a twinkle which for sake of decency he must not let this writer-chap detect to discount his poor consolation prize in life.

"Every man to his forte, of course!" he said; "but give me fox-huntin'. Must you go? I'm glad to have met you, and hope, as I said, to see more of you while you're here."

As they shook hands, Malet saw his eyes flash beyond him to the door. His face kindled with pride and affection and a tenderness that spoke of emotions underneath his pagan love of pleasure, and an air he wore of

dogged determination to wrest as much as was to be had from his particular lot in life.

"Hello, boy!" he cried. And Malet, taking his departure, was aware of his beautiful son strained for a moment to the father's breast, then pushed away with a forced light laugh and a careless greeting.

"You young monkey, and what mischief have you been up to since I saw you?"

Lady Lygon's gaze upon the two revealed her hotly jealous of them: jealous lest her boy should love better than he loved his mother the father who loved that mother not at all; jealous, perhaps, that the husband who loved her not at all should so love the boy who was the apple of her eye.

"Perhaps you will write to me," she said, as Malet bade her good-bye. "But come to see me again. I am to be found usually at five."

Crossing the velvet-turfed park, beneath benignant arms of patriarchal beeches, with glimpses of deer grazing, their noble antlered heads dropped tranquilly, he thought on the pity of it, that there should be disunion between this fine young couple. And he pitied profoundly this unhappy wife, who, endowed with all that rank and means bestowed, was nevertheless proposing, because of her pride and wounded heart, to cast her life and happiness to the winds.

Having passed his years in planning and contriving the love-stories of the pen-and-ink personages of his brain, and in forcing the troubled waters of their loves to run smoothly in his final chapters, he was taken with a sudden wish to shape the stories of these living persons to a happy-ever-after ending.

Despite his faults, Lygon showed to him as fine and virile. He had liked him all in a moment.

He described him to himself as good stuff shaping amiss. And experience had shown him that when masculine good stuff shapes amiss, it is almost invari-



ably the fault of two women: of the woman who shapes him wrong or of her who fails to shape him aright.

Until he should have seen this Delilah of a Mrs. Ferrers who was enslaving him, Malet lacked the key to the situation. She might be the mate beyond all others fitted to make the best man of him, or she might, of course, be merely—Delilah, shearing his locks and bringing down his temple of life about his ears!

He showed none of that demoralization which marks the man of crude intrigue. And Malet had found a strange restlessness and chafing in him for which he found it difficult to account.

Growing ever further interested in this living story, he pondered the counsel he should give to the unhappy wife.

At "Roseberry," Corry, who it seemed had been awaiting him with some impatience, came into the hall to meet him. He looked vexed and perplexed.

"Oh, I say, just come to the drawing-room, Uncle. Something has happened—such a nuisance. I want to talk about it."

Carry sat at her tea-table, her hands folded as though upon some debate in which she had had the final word. Her face was colorless and set, her eyes glittering and hostile. They had finished tea, emptied cups and half-filled dishes stood in slight disorder on the table. The peaceful and contented atmosphere Malet had envied to them at this same hour the preceding day, was conspicuously missing. On the table lay an opened letter.

Corry took it up, and said, in his fussy, good-humored way:

"Look here, did you ever know such a nuisance? These people write urgently. They want a room here for a case, and they want it at once. They ask for an immediate reply. And the fact is we're full up, every room filled. I want to refuse, but Carry is frightfully

keen on me taking the patient. Carry says she's sure you wouldn't mind——"

"Leaving?" Malet supplemented quietly, interpreting Mrs. Peter's inhospitable gaze. "Why, of course not. I will not inconvenience you for the world."

"Oh, hang it all!" Peter cried hotly. "I didn't mean that, of course. You can't surely think that, when you only came yesterday. What I mean is, I wonder if under the circumstances you'd mind changing your room—letting me have yours for this new patient—since Carry won't hear of refusing the case. Fact is, I should have to put you at the top of the house—a decent large room with a nice view, but really only an attic. But it would be only for a time. No. Five leaves next month, and you could then change into his room. It's a beastly nuisance, and it seems rotten to disturb you."

While he had been talking, the interest Malet had developed in the Lygon fortunes was having a hot tussle with his pride. All the latent and it seemed to him unreasoning antipathy he had felt in Carry from the first moment of their meeting was now glittering as open enmity in her eyes. She had hated his coming, and now, an opportunity presenting to be rid of him, she was adroitly twisting it to this end. If the term may be used of her prim strait-lacedness, her whole demeanor was a shout for his departure. In the teeth of animosity so strong and ill-concealed, his visit promised anything but pleasantly.

And yet he had become so keen to lend a helping hand to Lady Lygon, that he was disposed to brave it out. Moreover, despite her animosity, he still found Carry and her latent traits an interesting problem that remained to be solved. Rapid of thought as he was, by the time Peter had come to an end of the good-natured flounderings with which he was doing his best to cloak Carry's lack of hospitality, he had pocketed his pride and had devised a salve for its smarting.

"I don't mind in the least," he said good-temperedly. "Carry is right. You must not, of course, refuse patients. Any room with a bed and a window in it will suit me perfectly. And understand this, Peter, you must let me pay my way here. I insist on that. You've got this big house to keep up, and heavy expenses, and I insist on it that you shall take the terms from me that you would if I were a certified lunatic instead of being one at large."

To put a good face on things and to over-ride Carry's aversion, he forced a smile.

Peter blustered and protested.

"Hang it all! I won't hear a word of it, of course. What do you take me for? You're my mother's only brother, and have done everything for me, and you're jolly well welcome to stop here as long as you like."

He was genuinely distressed. Notwithstanding, Malet saw how he cast deprecating guilty looks at Carry, looks which told him that that astute young person had already suggested this practical way of securing her toleration of him.

She confirmed his suspicion. The hostile glitter in her eyes softened.

"Would you really rather?" she asked quickly. "Are you sure you wouldn't think it odd of us?"

"Not in the least."

"Oh, I say, hang it all!" poor Peter blustered again.

"My dear Peter," Malet told him, "you don't surely suppose I could think of sponging upon a young couple like you. It may suit me to remain some time here. I must do so with a clear conscience."

"Well, I'll be shot if you are going to pay for the attic," he blurted.

"At all events, quite moderate terms," Carry interposed.

She was not yet friendly. But she had now assumed the urbanity due to a business transaction.

After some further protest on Peter's part, the matter

was arranged. Malet was to occupy the attic temporarily. The terms were to be moderate. When these should fall vacant, he was to have a pleasant suite of rooms on the first floor.

All being arranged to her satisfaction, Carry even smiled her chill, restrained smile upon the interloper. For the same consideration, she was able to tolerate him as she did Lady Sarah and Mr. Thackeray.

"Now, do tell me about your visit," she appealed, while Peter sat down to write a telegram.

Malet, hurt and mortified, however, to find himself in company so uncongenial, excused himself and left her. He had to write an important letter, he said.

## CHAPTER VII

### A QUARREL

**W**HEN Malet left them, Lygon, after some minutes of lively chatter with his boy, sent him away to his friends.

"I want to talk to your mother," he said.

The boy flashed his luminous eyes with wistful earnestness between them, as though divining and secretly wondering at their disharmony.

"Mother," he appealed, in his fresh young voice, "don't bother any more about me going to school, dear. Really I shall be all right, you know. And if I don't like it, why I can stick it like the other chaps. Ernest Penrhyn told me he loathed leaving home at first, but now he doesn't mind so much. And you'll have me back in the holidays."

"All right, dear," she said quietly. "It is all arranged, you know."

Cyril gone, Lygon stalked to a window, and stood with his back to the room.

"I wonder you don't see that the boy can't be brought up a mollycoddle, tied to his mother's apron strings, Monica. He's got to rough it and to take his chances like the rest. Nothing licks youngsters into shape as school does."

He rapped the words out quickly, like one who strikes without delay in order to get the advantage of the first blow.

"We need not talk of it," she answered coldly. "We

shall never agree about it. I have brought him up carefully, with ideals and faiths. And now he is to go among a horde of young savages—schoolboys are little better—with coarse views of things and bullying and injustice. No better can be expected of raw boys without home influences to guide and refine them.”

It seemed that her talk with Malet, thawing her, moved her to explain herself more fully than her habit was with her husband.

For he wheeled round slowly, and stared at her, surprised.

“So you had some reason besides opposition to me for objecting to his going. Still, there’s nothing in it. The sooner he learns his world and learns to find his way in it, the better.”

He waited, his eyes expectant, as though inviting further confidence.

She merely made a gesture of indifference, to imply the uselessness of re-killing giants they had slain so many times before.

With an air then of entering upon a new subject, he strode back into the room, and leaning his arms on the rail of a *prie-Dieu* chair, he bent his eyes upon her.

“I came down to talk about your letter,” he said tersely. “Will you explain what you meant by it?”

She lifted her eyes and shot a steel lance from them; then dropped them again haughtily.

“It was clear enough, surely. I am going to Cannes, and so I cannot receive your party. Nora can play hostess for you.”

“You mean you are going to Cannes to escape my party?”

She raised a shoulder.

“Why state things baldly?”

“Because I want to come at the bald truth. Why do you wish to avoid my friends?”

“Spare me a scene,” she said quickly. “We have

always avoided the vulgarity of scenes. Let us do so to the end. You must know as well as I do why I decline to be here next week."

"I want you to state it, so that we may have it all out. I believe in plain speaking."

"I refuse to discuss it."

She rose and moved to the door. But he was before her, and stood with his back against it.

"We must have this out," he insisted.

She remained mute and disdainful, drawn to her height like one at bay. His strong body was the master of her weaker one as regarded detention, but his strong will could not force speech from her equally strong one. He fell now to cross-examination.

"Is it because Mrs. Ferrers is coming?"

It seemed that he was unable to keep a thread of constraint from sounding in his voice. It was the first time in their strained relations upon her account that her name had been mentioned between them as a cause of these.

"Please let me go."

"Not till you have answered. Are you going away because Mrs. Ferrers is to be of the party?"

She met his eyes, and answered tonelessly,

"I am."

"And what have you against Mrs. Ferrers?" he flashed out, with so much anger that she shrank involuntarily. "Come now, this has been smoldering a long while. Let us have it out. What do you dare to insinuate against my friend?"

Now she flashed out too, like one who had been struck a blinding blow striking back out of blind anger.

"*I dare?*" she cried, her nostrils quivering.

"I don't mean as a question of physical courage, of course," he said quietly. "There is no need of physical courage. The word applied to your conscience merely."

"Oh, this is so vulgar," she protested, with a sickened

face. "We have never descended before to the vulgarity of loud voices and threats. You shall let me pass."

"You are always so superior," he cried; "always such a pulseless block of ice. You set one's blood freezing. I suppose it is your nature, and you cannot help it. You were the same at eighteen. But I was fool enough to think that you would change."

"Why did you marry me? You never cared for me."

"Lord knows! It was a horrible mistake for both of us. And yet it was the best in me that made me do it. You were young and beautiful . . . and good. I meant to make a new beginning. But it's no use going back to all that. It's a bad business, and we've got to make the best of it. Women of your temperament are happier in a convent, Monica."

"Perhaps so. At all events, with their different upbringing, it is not strange that the points of view of a young girl as I was then, and of the man of the world that you were, should be different."

Again he stared at her.

"You never talked like this before. You have always seemed too lofty and remote to have a human point of view. Even about Cyril going to school, you have merely objected without giving reasons."

"Let me go," she repeated. "I have letters to write."

"No. Since you are giving reasons, you shall give me a reason for declining to receive Mrs. Ferrers, a woman every one is proud to have at their houses, a high favorite at Court, and all the rest of it."

After a chilly pause,

"Suppose I do not like her?"

"That is no reason, of course. How many of the people we are civil to, do we really like? She has been asked to take part in this Pageant. She has herself written the book. These people are coming to rehearse it. It would be a public insult to leave her out of the party."



She fell silent. Then she looked at him with hard eyes.

"Suppose my reason is that it offends me to see you making yourself—absurd about her."

The blood rushed to his face.

"Absurd!" he repeated hotly. The word seemed to lodge in his throat. "Absurd!" he said again. "Upon my soul, I don't know what you mean. If you mean I admire her, I'm not alone in that. She's a remarkable and a distinguished woman. No man with an ounce of discrimination can help admiring her."

"All this is quite fruitless," she said tensely. "And I am not interested in Mrs. Ferrers' perfections."

She made a step to the door.

"No," he resisted firmly. "As we have got so far, and as you are in the rare mood to talk, let us thresh the whole thing out. Won't you sit?"

"No, thank you."

They stood eyeing one another. Then he said, in a changed voice:

"Look here, Monica, it's no earthly use for us to quarrel. Can't we come to some sort of understanding? You and I are only another of the millions of couples who don't hit it off together. We are and always must be incompatible. We can't help it; it is our natures. I respect and admire you for virtues and so forth you have and that many women haven't, but I'm not in love with you.

"You, I think, don't give me credit for a single decent quality, and have never cared a hang for me—no reason why you should, if you can't, of course! We can't make ourselves love or not love as the parsons think we should. But why the deuce should you play dog-in-the-manger? You don't want me yourself. Then why in the name of all that's irrational, kick because I make a friend of another woman—of a clever and distinguished woman of our own set. If I were to pick up with some dancer or

gimcrack person of that sort, there'd be some sort of reason for your kicking.

"Come now, be rational. Can't you see how dog-in-the-manger you're behaving? Hang it all, a man must feel that somebody is interested enough in him to care whether he's alive or dead."

"And does Mrs. Ferrers?" she submitted icily, although her eyes were burning.

He shrank perceptibly. It seemed that she now cut him to the quick.

There was an interval before he spoke. Then,

"At all events she doesn't sneer," he said quietly. "A woman should not sneer; it's vulgar. And it doesn't suit you to be vulgar, Monica." He added with feeling: "Can't we turn over a new leaf? Can't we agree amicably each to let the other go his and her way?"

"Suppose I were to take a man-friend, and make myself absurd about him?"

He stiffened at that.

"Oh, of course not," he said curtly. "I don't want any of that kind of thing. Have a dozen men-friends if you like, but not any particular one. No, deuce take it! have the qualities of your defects, Monica. Your temperament makes you independent of men. Well, make a virtue of it—a virtue and a distinction, because it amounts to that nowadays when women are so easy."

"All this leads to nothing," she said dully. "Please open the door."

"You will be reasonable, then, and invite these people and be here to receive them?"

He rested his eyes upon her with such a smile as he had not turned on her for years. The quick electric quality of him, and his smile of practised guile, set her for an instant swaying to him with a rush of feeling. The next, realizing that he was employing his alluring gift in the interests of that other, a revulsion of anger succeeded.

Yet so long she had practised and so well acquired control of face and feeling, that he missed all but the repellent coldness and hardness in her.

"I will not invite Mrs. Ferrers," she said. "And if she comes I shall go, as I have said, to Cannes."

Had she been one to take pleasure in revenge, his crestfallen and perturbed face, showing how much depended upon her decision, how much, no doubt, her rival had made of having her way in this, must greatly have pleased her. But there was no meanness in her, no joy in retaliation, no heart for congratulation. Her refusal was a due, she considered, of her self-respect. She would not play abettor to his weakness.

There was no persuasion now in look or tone as he said tersely:

"And this is your final decision?"

She bent her head. She looked again to the door. He opened it now, and she went out.

Upstairs she locked herself in her beautiful bedroom above the boudoir, and, like it, overlooking the Italian garden. She sat down at a window, staring out. Her face was blanched, save for a single spot of cruel color, high upon a cheek, suggesting hope strangled on a gibbet.

Presently, with a shiver, she pressed her hands over her ears, and turning her head, buried her eyes in the cushion of her chair.

Heaven! To shut out that glance and smile! If only it had asked anything of her but that, how sweet to have assented! Heaven! To satisfy this hunger of the heart to be at peace with him, to lay her tortured face for one dear moment at his breast, to hold his hands! Was ever pain more poignant than this of the wife's to love with longing irresistible the husband who recoiled from her—who loved another?

It was here, to this house, that he had brought her for their bridal week. It was here he had taught her

to love him, here he had unlocked in her the flood-gates of amazing emotions that had swept over and submerged her. How wonderful to her ingenuousness had seemed his chivalry and thoughtful tenderness, how fervid his devotion!

And then, at the end of a week, she had come to herself with a shock, to find that the sweetness which had seemed to her to partake among other celestial qualities of the celestial quality of the eternal, was at an end; to find he had tired of the beautiful child, whom he had made dumb and stupid with the unaccustomed drug of sense.

Conditions that leave shallow and emotionless women self-possessed and glib, render emotional ones perturbed and speechless. For speech is the language of shallowness, and far more often than it conceals thought it conceals lack of thought.

He, having drunk of life before, could drink now without intoxication, and he returned from his bridal week disillusioned, because he had failed to find in marriage all that he had been led to hope from it.

There had been something so inspiring and enchanting in this girl's pure dreaming eyes, something about her so virginal and full of mystery, that he had thought by way of her to enter a fair world of life and feeling heretofore unknown. And yet she showed unconscious now of the exquisiteness wherewith her beautiful young body was rife, and which he had thought to know by way of her. She was shy and monosyllabic, and seemed as incapable of feeling as of revealing the incalculable things he had conjectured of her. It was as though she had conjured in his mind fancies and ideals she had never herself imagined or realized; engendered thoughts she lacked imagination to conceive.

Not loving, but having merely idealized her, he was vastly disappointed to find her, on nearer acquaintance, fall lamentably short of the heights to which he had

raised her. So disappointed he was, that before their honeymoon was out, he had impatiently described her to himself as a charming little simpleton, without mind, conversation, knowledge of the world, or resource; with scarcely any of the qualities, in short, that make for comradeship.

Having found these other things in other women, he had irrationally looked to find them in a girl of eighteen, super-added to the innocence and virginal mysteriousness that made her chiefest charm for him. Thinking her dark and dreaming eyes the loveliest he knew, for the childlike purity and maiden candor in them, he was nevertheless impatient when he found them still blind as those of a young kitten to a number of the facts of life, a knowledge whereof was its salt and indispensable to its enjoyment.

Though less than thirty, he was yet too old and had seen too much of the world not to have forgotten how it looked from the view-point of eighteen. And yet he was not old enough—nor wicked enough—to enjoy her youth and unsophistication as a *sauce piquante* to his own years and experience. Nor was he sufficiently patient or subtle to bridge the gulf between her ingenuousness and his world-wisdom. His world had spoiled him. He did not want the fag of building bridges, he looked to be whirled across gulfs on magic carpets.

The result of all this was that his charming young bride bored him sadly, and forced him to the conclusion that although a man must range himself and marry, it was nevertheless a dull thing to do, and one that he must make the best of as he could.

On her part, because she loved him and was of a proud and sensitive nature, the discovery that she bored him made her yet more shy and dumb. The sweetness and enchantment that men ask of women for the charming of prosaic life were native to her, but for the present

these fair things had been so fluttered that they had fled the dovecote. They would have come homing again; but in the meantime he had become disillusioned by the vacancy he found there.

True comradeship cannot exist with constraint. And her dumbness was even less bar to their good fellowship than were the desperate attempts to interest him with which she alternated it. On his part, he, too, ashamed that he should feel so little zest in the society of his young lovely bride, made efforts—less desperate, but efforts none the less—to hide his disappointment.

And the labor of acting a part being super-added to boredom, after the manner of men and more particularly of men whose lives have been too easy, so soon as his wife's company began to be a tax, he taxed himself with it as little as might be.

Within a year of their marriage, Cyril had been born. And the young mother being no more than a girl, the strain of impending motherhood had placed her at even greater disadvantage, keeping her ailing and languid and spent by reason of the developing life now drawing upon her resources.

It was at this epoch that he had learned to find his interests and amusements apart from her. And following upon her boy's birth, a long illness and a two months' convalescence abroad had so further and finally alienated them, that the bond between them lapsed into a strained and forced relationship—a common enough state in marriage, but a state almost intolerable to the high-mettled.

With years and knowledge she had acquired the knowledge of life and the woman's conscious power and charm which he had missed in her, but now pride and temper barred the pass between them.

Moreover, her pent-up affections finding outlet in motherhood, she devoted herself to her boy, thus further excluding her husband from her life.

To complete the domestic catastrophe, three years previously Mrs. Ferrers had come upon the scene, and had finally severed such slender threads and shreds of interest and feeling as remained, and might have served to draw them together again.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MALET'S COUNSEL

**A**S now, in the face of the climax to which all this had brought them, she reviewed with a hot, sick heart the wrongs and sufferings of her twelve years' wedlock, and thought with pain upon her approaching release therefrom, Malet's note was brought to her.

She opened it indifferently. How could he, a stranger, clever and sympathetic though he was, add anything to her own long intimate knowledge of her case, with its ever-recurring irritations and its ache of hopelessness? Already he had disappointed her by seeming to take the man's point of view, by seeming to find condonation for her husband's disaffection.

She sighed wearily as she took out some pages of close writing. Must she read all this? She must, of course, since she herself had invoked it.

If you place in the hands of a clairvoyant a letter or other belonging of some one of whom you desire news, he or she may be found to possess a power of higher vision, which will reveal the character or mood, even the fate and circumstances of your friend—showing that the subconscious mind has communicated some subtle element appreciable by a "sensitive"; one, that is, whose own subconscious mind is preternaturally quickened.

Some such influence would seem to have been generated by Malet's mood of sympathy, and imparted to his letter. For as she held it listlessly between her languid



fingers, a new quietness stole over her, calming and hypnotizing her hot fevered thoughts.

Soon she unfolded and read it. Though closely written it was clearly written, and the first sentence chained her attention and led her interested to the next, until presently, absorbed, she read with every faculty engaged.

Fine writer as he was, his forte lay in expressing himself so lucidly that his thoughts flashed straight, like light, to the mental retina of his reader, without hampering the sense by inept words. Always it was just the right word; always the sentence was of the length proportioned to the value of the thought; always the rhythm was so smooth and perfect as to excite the same harmonious pleasure in the mind that music does, thus adding the cadence of imagined sound to the flow of ideation.

He wrote, moreover, with so much candor and sincerity, that the message, warm from his heart, seemed to melt the ice and hardness of her own.

When she came to that sentence in which he signed himself hers very truly Christopher Malet, tears were running down her face—soft cool tears such as she had not shed for years.

Like was too short and sad he said, too tragic and inexplicable for us to complicate it further by misunderstandings and cross-purposes. We were but atoms driven by vast incalculable forces to vast appointed ends. Like straws in strong winds, we were swept now here, now there, as the currents of destiny now caught and whirled, and then abandoned us; yet abandoned us but seldom in the places in which they had found us.

And of these currents, Love, or Sex-attraction, was the greatest and the most mysterious. Answering to it, men were moved to the basest or to the very noblest issues. Now waking the merely crude and selfish in them, it showed as an instinct merely of the flesh, common to all flesh and subject to its limitations. But now transcending flesh and quickening the soul, it showed

like an electric force, Heaven-generated and superior to all expedients, finding and binding true affinities in bonds invincible.

The crime of an unlegalized affection lay, not in its illegality, but in its unworthiness. In the burning phases of a great passion, a man's life was temporarily harnessed to a star, and while briefly he pursued the headlong course entailed by such a Bayard, he might well play havoc with the world's conventions, and—alas!—perhaps with hearts.

The fact must be faced, cruel though it were, that this she regarded as a mere infatuation on her husband's part, might be the working of a true affinity. And when among the myriads of their fellow-creatures, a man and a woman met their true affinity, the gods called to them across the wilds, and they were left no choice.

The brave and strong, and in the main the happiest persons, were they who recognized circumstances as the implements of development, pain and obstacle as rungs by which we climb the evolutionary ladders. Believing in Re-birth, as so many thinking persons did to-day, and realizing an endless succession of lives upon this and other planets as the lot of all, one saw how small and of what little account—albeit in the aggregate important—were the happenings of any single life.

For that we missed in one would be made up to us in future lives.

"Dear lady," he wrote. "Brace yourself by facing such great issues. Cease to fret, to chafe, to battle. Lay down your arms and open your mind and heart to the vast quiet powers of Nature. The Scheme is so Good and so Grand that we should not grudge the little ache which is our little contribution to the Great Revenue. Since we must all pay our tax to the great Administration, let us do so cheerfully and intelligently, making a loyal and ungrudging gift of it.

"To fight against our share in the pain and stress of

climbing the steepes which are the way of evolution is to involve ourselves in a perpetual and grievous battle with the great inevitable.

"If you must play a losing game, play it magnanimously. At Bridge you are able gracefully to see your rivals win. Play the game of life in the same mood, and, believe me, the generosity you will thereby conjure in yourself will rob loss of its sting.

"To lose in the great tug of love is grievous, but yet no human education will have been completed until one has learned the art of losing the best thing—well.

"My counsel is to take no hasty step. We do the best for our success and happiness who meddle least with our conditions. We never know what the gods may not be holding gently on their knees for us, provided we continue on our way.

"Do not, therefore, change your skies, but change your mood, and see what comes of the brighter atmosphere you thus engender.

"In the meantime, there are a thousand interests in a world of interests and opportunities. If I may so far venture, I suggest that the best of all the anodynes for pain is the greater pain and misery of others. For when one goes into the world of stint and sorrow, he discovers that unhappiness is a luxury the truly miserable are unable, of their poverty, to afford.

"Compared with these who lack the rudiments of living—air and sunshine, food and clothing, space and leisure to turn round—the higher sorrows are but privileges serving for the operations of the soul."

In a postscript was added:

"On re-reading this I find that you may read into it a less hopeful view of the position than I myself take, or would wish you to feel. My strong impression is that only misunderstanding, and not incompatibility, is spoiling an otherwise happy union.

"But will you allow me to say that the modern view of

dealing with defaulters is opposed to punishment. When a child does wrong, better than to whip or to scold him it is to turn his interest from mischief to something more attractive."

The rain of tears drawn from her by the humanity and high forbearance of his letter, was dried by a wave of heat occasioned by his postscript.

In her treatment of her husband, she was conscious of stifling so much of rebellion and pride that she had not realized how much of these escaped to show upon the surface. Malet's postscript betrayed the truth, that her demeanor not only whipped her husband for his defection, but that it further whipped him by showing him whipped to the world.

She was covered with shame to think she should have seemed to chastise. The pose of a neglected and resentful wife was one abhorrent to her delicacy.

She sat for long in thought.

A subtle and a clever woman, the truth of Malet's words impressed her.

One might change one's skies without changing one's distressful mind, but by changing one's distressful mind all skies might show more blue.

As for the freedom she had thought to give him, he had shown no sign of seeking it. No breath of scandal with regard to him or to any other of her admirers had touched her rival. So far as the world saw, despite his devotion, Lygon was held, like the others, at the arms' length of friendship. If these two had a secret to keep, they were keeping it as secret as the grave.

Being wife in name only, she could without hurt to her pride foster a kinder relation with her husband. Could she not be his friend, since he asked nothing dearer of her? Could she not school herself to bear with his infatuation, since otherwise his life would be as loveless and as empty as her own?

She determined to make the attempt. For if she

would not degenerate wholly into the hard and bitter woman she was fast becoming, she must do something to relieve the torturing high-pressures of her soul, something to engender calmer atmospheres of thought.

In the spirit of a new departure, when her maid came to dress her, she rejected the black gown of lace she had previously chosen, and chose one now of ivory velvet. White was the raiment for a new-born resolution.

"But, my lady," Britton remonstrated, "your ivory velvet is just fresh from Doucet! Will your ladyship not keep that for the week when your house-party is here?"

The eyes of maid and mistress met in the mirror before which the latter was sitting. It chagrined her to see in Britton's a glint of curiosity to learn whether her mistress would or would not remain to receive the house-party. For what a faithful and devoted maid of some years' standing does not know about her mistress's conjugal distresses would not fill a pill-box.

"I can wear it this evening without spoiling its freshness," her mistress returned quietly.

When she went down presently, to find Lygon glowering like a thunder-cloud in a corner of the drawing-room, she said, in a new level voice to match her calmer mood:

"I have reconsidered my decision, Morant. I will write to those people this evening, inviting them for the 17th."

"All of them?"

"Yes."

"And you will remain?"

"Yes."

"Thanks—much. It's tophole of you, Monica."

His eyes avoided her. And the clearing of his thunder-cloud in obvious relief was a trial to her newly fledged intentions. For soaring aspirations frequently fall lame when they begin to walk the road of actuality, cobblestoned with fact.

## CHAPTER IX

### LITTLE ELFIE

**M**ALET was genuinely a philosopher. But this did not preserve him from being subject to fits of nervous irritability and depression.

The strain of sustaining the super-world of the imagination is so much a tax upon the powers, that the writer, like other brain-workers, is but seldom in normal health. He pays the price of his extended range of faculty in physical exhaustion.

So our poor Malet, who exploited his nervous powers in creating and keeping alive the personages of his stories, found himself sadly depleted by these vampire-creatures. Ethereal beings, dwelling like gods among the mountains of his mind, toiling not nor spinning, but wreathing their high passionate lives of story out of the delicate vapors of his brain, he was but stomach, heart, and lungs to them.

While they marched, beautiful and primed with health, throughout his pages, he, poor man, trudged on behind, drab and stoop-shouldered, a victim to nerves and depressions.

Fagged out as he was now by the labors of a book and disheartened by his conjugal catastrophe, he had put so much whole-hearted sympathy into his letter to Lady Lygon as to have brought on a severe headache.

This, with an attendant fit of nervous irritability, made that change of room of which he had made light to Corry, a tax and a bore.

He dined with the Corrys alone, Mr. Thackeray being too much engrossed with his incomparable one to come down, while Lady Sarah was indisposed. He slept badly, and at his request breakfast was sent up to him.

He had just finished dressing, when without knock or "By your leave" his door was pushed open, and a child about three years old ran in.

For the first time he remembered that Peter had a little daughter. The little creature thus unceremoniously trespassing upon him must be Peter's little daughter. Plainly it was she, an elfish, dark-haired morsel, with Carry's deep-set eyes and Corry's irresolute mouth. Not a chubby or a healthy child, nor a pretty one, although there was something engaging in the eerie seriousness of her deep eyes and in her wistful mouth.

When she had taken in the situation of a stranger and intruder buttoning his coat with an air of being at home in a room which, it seemed, had been hitherto hers, she raised a hand and pointed vaguely across the world.

"Go away!" she instructed firmly.

Finding him show no sign of obeying, standing smiling down upon her from a great way up, she knit her brows and stamped a tiny foot in slippers.

"Bad man, go away—d'rectly minute!"

Malet, feeling methods of conciliation called for, asked meekly:

"Well, little girl, and what is your name?"

She was not to be cajoled, however.

She raised a pallid fist, and as though to show the sort of thing he might expect, she dealt a valiant blow, somewhere in his direction.

"Bad man, go out of my day-nurs'ry," she said. "It's my day-nurs'ry—not yours."

"But it's my bedroom. Look! There's my bed in it!"

"Take it out!"

She pointed a second time across illimitable latitudes to which, of her clemency, she gave him leave to carry it.

"But I can't lift it. It's too heavy for a little chap like me."

"Go away, Little Chap, or I shall eat you."

She picked up her pinafore, and covering her face with it, ran at him with simulated fury, uttering violent sounds like those of an engine super-charged with steam.

Then she retired to her former vantage ground, and dropping her pinafore, studied the effects of intimidation. These being nil, she weakened and began to whimper.

He was fond of children and a favorite with them. He picked her up with an uncompromising firmness he had found effective and seating himself set her upon his knee.

"Jack and Jill went up the hill  
To fetch a pail of water,"

he repeated.

"Jack fell down and broke his crown,  
And Jill came tumbling after."

She whimpered through it all, but in a tone so subdued as not to lose a word.

"More!" she said when he came to the end.

He began it again.

She stopped him.

"More!—More!"

He discovered that "More" did not mean that he should repeat the verses, but that he should tell her a sequel to the catastrophe.

Being a professional teller of stories, he found no difficulty about this. He told her such a sequel that she sat petrified with interest, her round eyes staring fascinated at the mouth from which, like a conjurer's bright-colored ribbons, the marvels issued.



Then,

"Stay here always," she said, "and tell Elfie about Jack and Jill—not out of a book."

She condescended to eat a spoonful of honey he took from his breakfast tray, although her mind being hungrier than her body was, she swallowed it in haste, to say,

"Now tell me 'Little Yed Yiding Hood'—not out of a book."

"Not out of a book," meant "with some probability of being true."

Having heard adventures of Red Riding Hood to make her stare, she put up a cold little hand and touched his cheek caressingly.

"Stop here always, an' never go away—not for a hundred thousand years!" she said.

"All right!" he agreed.

She gave a sigh of satisfaction on the compact.

"Now let's 'tend you're a little boy come to play wiv me. And let's play."

"All right," he said again, with a good grace.

The bright morning and a crisp invigorating air invited him to walk. But it would have needed a harder heart than his was to withstand the appeal of the coaxing voice and the touch of the chill little hand.

It was only to have been expected, he thought, that Carry, of the cold, starved nature, thin and spent with ceaseless activities, without a curve or other endowment of motherhood, should have produced this little elfish creature, with her peaked sharp chin, her bluish pallor, and the quick precocious brain one could see wearing itself out behind her deep eyes.

She became suddenly mysterious. Lest the ponderous echoes of her mighty feet wake the vigilance of guardians she tip-toed up to him, and whispered softly:

"Nannie's downstairs talkin' to Fritz. Don't make any noise, an' I'll go an' get some fings to play wiv."

She ran to her nursery, and returned with her pinafore filled to overflowing with that which showed like odds-and-ends of rubbish rescued from a waste-paper basket. Under her deft hands, however, and the glowing illusions of her absorbed eyes, they turned out to be valuable properties. There were three empty cotton-reels, a cup without a handle, some pieces of tissue paper, a length of tinsel braid, an old pair of spectacles, a thimble, and last and not least, a small black pig of Irish bog-wood, such as is worn on a bangle for a charm.

She took her contraband carefully out of her pinafore, setting each article upon a chair with an impressive flourish of the hand and a contented sigh, to express relief that all had safely made the perilous journey down the passage.

"What are we going to play at?" Malet asked.

"Wait, Little Boy, till I'm ready."

No more than the *Midsummer Night's Dream* could be staged without its scenario of the Forest of Arden, could her small drama be played without accessories.

She smoothed out the scraps of tissue paper, laid each flat upon the floor, and set a reel upon it quickly before it had time to blow away, experience having doubtless shown her the flighty propensities of tissue paper in a world of draughts. Having smoothed them flat, she crumpled them afresh, and swathed the castors of the table-legs with them. This was to make them "look smart," she explained; and certainly the paper frillies lent a gala air to things.

She set the last piece of tissue paper on the edge of the table, and after carefully polishing it with her pinafore, placed the handle-less cup upside-down upon it. On the top of the cup she perched the thimble, likewise inverted. A throne having thus been prepared for the bog-wood pig, it only remained to get the bog-wood pig to occupy it.

Being a pig he proved obstinate, however. And when

at last, after frequent admonishment, he was persuaded to sit, he sat in quite unkingly fashion, with his bogwood legs held stiffly in the air.

Having ranged the empty reels about him for courtiers, her preliminaries were complete.

Now she withdrew behind a chair, and was busy for some minutes with her own make-up. She emerged with the spectacles across her small nose, her frock pinned up on one side, and round her shoulders the tinsel braid suspended like a mayor's collar.

Thus apparelled, she advanced toward Malet, and said in a mincing voice, intended to conceal identity,

"I'm Mrs. Brown, Little Boy. I've come to take you to the sea-side to paddle and make sand-castles!"

Tickets were bought at the fender, the hearthrug served them for an air-ship; they reached their destination at the window, and built castles on the linoleum strand which skirted the carpet. And ever and anon she caught the little fellow's hand, and dragged him back strenuously, only just in time to save him from drowning in breakers that came billowing in from her imagination.

In the meantime, however, Nannie, having finished her gossip with Fritz—and to judge by her expression, having finished it in a manner painful to her feelings—the sea-siders were swooped upon with rancor. Malet was assailed with angry looks, the pig was violently deposed from kingship, the cup and thimble confiscated, while the friendly reels, which in their capacity as thrilled spectators had been comporting themselves with mild decorum, were ruthlessly swept into the grate.

"You naughty, naughty gell!" screamed Nannie wrathfully. "Didn't I tell you to stop in your nursery? And my silver thimble too! I never heard of such a thing. You might have lost it, you little fractious thing! There's no trusting you out of my sight for a single minute."

At the first sound of the harsh voice, Malet saw the little creature blench and quiver. Her smiles were quenched like snuffed-out lights. Her frail little body shrank like a sensitive plant when sharply touched. She drew a quick convulsive breath.

In an instant all the glittering world of fancy she had spun about her like a shining web, collapsed.

Handle-less cups were but cups without handles, reels reels, thimbles, thimbles. The linoleum floor was no longer a billowy strand, nor Mrs. Brown an autocrat in spectacles and Lord Mayor's collar. She was now but a shrinking, drab-faced child, in a panic at the nervous shock of tumbling headlong out of cloudland down to hard earth.

Malet, having seen the flying shuttles of her child-brain weaving blameless dreams, thought of Nannie as a blustering bull in a Dresden china-shop.

"The child was doing no harm," he defended her stoutly.

"Beggin' your pardon," Nannie retorted with airs of authority, "but she happens to have a cold, and ought to be kept to one room. She's frightfully delicate, and gets croup. And she's a naughty, naughty gell!" she ended, raising her voice to a shrill pitch which the culprit's screaming now made necessary if she were to profit by it. "She's ever such a naughty gell to come out of her warm nursery when Nannie told her to stop by the fire and do her Kindergarten sewing."

"Heavens! how do people come to trust their children to such crass, mindless persons? How can plumbers' and laborers' daughters be expected to understand the complex, delicate child mind?" he reflected, as Elfie was borne off, frightened and screaming, to the penal servitude with a hired wardess, which is only too often the deplorable lot of those children whose mothers can afford to depute their mother duties.

"I made friends this morning with your little girl, or to tell the truth, she made friends with me," Malet told Carry at luncheon. "What an engaging little child she is!"

Carry, who had now become tolerant toward him, melted further. Her eyes gleamed; the angles of her mouth softened.

"*We* think her a nice child," she said in her restrained fashion, "but I'm afraid we spoil her shockingly. Peter does, at all events."

Peter laughed genially.

"Let 'em have a good time while they're young, I say," he said now. "They'll probably have to rough it before they've done."

"But children must be trained and disciplined," Carry insisted. "I'm glad to say I have an excellent nurse—one who is firm and knows how to manage her. The last one indulged her far too much. Before everything, children need firmness."

"I should have thought kindness was the first consideration," Malet said.

"Kindness, of course," she agreed sententiously. "But firmness most of all."

"She doesn't get on half so well with this nurse," Peter said compunctiously. "She's nothing but skin and bone. I wish she had my constitution. She's all nerves and fancies, poor little thing."

He turned a troubled face to Malet.

"She's so smart and full of ideas," Carry said, with pleased pride. "Perhaps she'll be a genius like Charlotte Brontë or George Eliot."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Malet. "Let her be a happy human being, and lead a happy normal life. The literary temperament and life are often more curses than they are blessings."

Carry looked obstinate.

"I don't want my child to be a nonentity," she said.

"I have ambitions for her. I want her to be a credit to us."

To Malet, recalling the fragile little sensitive creature, with her deep eyes and shadowy face, it seemed pitiful to rest the burden of ambition on such shoulders.

Carry changed the subject.

"Is No. Seven room ready, Car?" he asked. "That new patient will be here at three."

"It's ready, of course."

Peter cast her an admiring glance.

"You'll never find Carry dozing," he told Malet. "She's got a brain like clock-work. Elfie gets her smartness from her mother."

He became suddenly embarrassed. His eyes shifted.

"By the way, Carry, I thought you and Uncle Chris might like a drive this afternoon. It's such a fine day. And as the brougham has to go to the station, I ordered a landau from Tibbit's. It's coming at half-past two, sharp."

Carry received this intelligence with something approaching stupefaction. She turned and stared at him as though struck dumb. Then:

"You—ordered—a—landau?" she repeated slowly.

"Why, yes," he said, blustering a little. "Why shouldn't I? I thought Uncle Chris would like to see the country round, and get some air. And I knew a drive would do you good. It's the only way to keep you off your feet for an hour."

There was certainly something suspicious in his manner. Malet saw it, as Carry did. Her looks, probing for possible reasons, fastened like gimlets on his dropped lids.

"Peter, how extraordinary of you! What in the world do you mean by arranging this without a word to me. I never knew you to do such a thing before. And Mr. Malet, very likely, will not care to go."

She turned to Malet with an air that bade him say so.

But Peter also looked at him: shot such a glance at him that Malet, divining that for some mysterious reason Peter greatly wished him to drive, replied that he would, on the contrary, enjoy the excursion.

Carry now searched his face, suspecting that this concocting of plans without having first consulted her was the outcome of a conspiracy between the men.

Malet preserved an expressionless face.

Then Corry forced a laugh—manifestly forced it.

"What in the world is there extraordinary about it?" he said. "It's the most natural thing in the world that you and Uncle should drive on a fine afternoon! So mind you're ready, Carry, sharp, and don't waste any of this sunshine. I thought perhaps you'd drive round Puddick Mill. The air is fresh there, and may bring a bit of color to your cheeks."

"But, Peter, I'm not going. I must be here, of course, to see this new patient settled into her room. I can't have you making plans for me like this. It's too annoying for words."

"Oh, rot, Car! There's nothing annoying about it. I want you and Uncle to get a nice drive. And there's no need at all for you to trouble about the patient. Hannah and I can manage perfectly."

"You never have done it before."

"We will to-day, anyhow. Besides, there's a special nurse coming by a later train. She's to take over the patient as soon as the nurse who brings her has left."

"Why doesn't the nurse who brings her stop with her?"

"Oh, do," he protested impatiently, "—stop asking questions. She's not stopping because she's leaving. And because she's leaving and the patient can't look after herself, another nurse is coming to look after her. That's intelligible, surely."

"You're frightfully smart, no doubt. But perhaps you'll tell me why the new nurse doesn't go direct to

the patient's home, and bring her here herself. That would have been still more intelligible."

"Oh, well, I didn't arrange it," he said. "But there's nothing to make a mystery of."

"It's you who are making a mystery of it."

She watched his shifting eyes and guilty shufflings. "What is the matter with you, Peter?"

"Oh, hang! There's nothing the matter. Do go and get your things on, Carry, not to lose the sunshine."

"I'm not going. I won't have arrangements made for me."

Corry was nonplussed. He turned to Malet.

"You persuade her," he said. "Doesn't she look washed out, and wouldn't the air do her good? And I'm sure *you* would like to drive."

Malet belonged to a sex which, knowing any individual member of it unequal to the task of outwitting any individual member of the other, bands itself together in an armed neutrality against that wilier other sex. Accordingly, though unaware of any reason for doing so, he now played into his nephew's hands.

Mildly but firmly he expressed himself as so keen upon driving round Puddick Mill with Carry that she could not in common civility resist further.

And presently, despite her strong desire to sift the mystery of Peter's new patient, she went upstairs to dress.

When she had gone, Malet turned to Peter with a quizzical smile.

"What is the mystery, Peter?"

Peter shrugged a shoulder, and dropped his eyes again.

"A professional confidence!" he said, and began to talk of something else.

When Carry came down, smart and piquant in a dark-blue velvet sacque and toque, with a white veil softening her hard outlines, and a knot of violets at her breast, it seemed her wits were busy still upon the puzzle.



"What is this girl's name?" she asked, as she came in.

Peter made a little deprecating gesture.

"Ivy."

"Ivy what?"

"Ivy Smith—Miss Ivy Smith." He added, "You look ripping, Car—absolutely."

He glanced jealously at Malet.

"You're in luck," he said. "Wish I were in your shoes."

"But you must stop and see that nobody gets a glimpse of this mysterious patient," she said caustically.

When he had settled her in the carriage and tucked the rug about her, she added:

"Mind you don't bungle it, my dear, and let the nurses meet, and the new nurse learn more from the old one than it is discreet for her to know!"

Whereat, Peter flushed, and mumbled something incoherent, while Malet reflected that there could not be many secrets, professional or otherwise, that his nephew kept hidden from this little wife of his.

As he had realized earlier, Carry, although capable of being singularly disagreeable, was nevertheless interesting. And by the time they returned from their two hours' drive he had found a sort of relish in her acid shrewdness and her irony: such a liking as one may have for Worcester sauce or cayenne pepper, for the sharp and pungent savor of them, rather than for any really pleasant quality.

Their drive round Puddick Mill—a queer old battered structure which, standing on a hill-side, looked like a squat old bonneted grandmother watching out, hand over brows, for homing grandchildren, and served for a landmark rather than for an object of beauty to the countryside—took them through scenes of varied charm; grim and beetling heights and smiling valleys; through rustic lanes, now smoldering with the dying fires of autumn;

beside a rushing river and an ivy-mantled ruined nunnery.

Malet, his imagination responsive to every hue and sound, saw that Carry was wholly insensible to these beauties of Nature. Her eyes were absent, introspective on her own affairs, or became suddenly alert and shining on the shop windows of a neighboring town, on clothes of women passing, on house fronts and vegetable gardens, chicken runs and other objects with an appeal for the mind economic.

Though scarcely amounting to a sense of humor, she had a quick eye for the incongruous, and a forked tongue for remarking on it. And from time to time he observed that characteristic raising and depressing of her head upon her long neck, which had shown him the snake in her.

He had evolved a theory that human beings have come up through many species, to reach their present stages of development. That they have come up only by that stock from which the ape is a degeneration, seemed to him untenable.

He saw in the men and women round him vestiges as much of bear and lion, deer and tiger, rabbit, fish, and snake as there were in them of ape. The ape was the degenerate representative of one only—of perhaps the highest—of those ancestral forms from which man had sprung.

And so believing, and detecting a snake origin in Carry, he wondered again with interest how the ancestral traits would show themselves, should circumstance resuscitate them where they lay on the bed-rock of character, beneath super-added strata of later development.

He felt a trifle chilly down the spine, sitting beside her, and observing her, cold and lithe and gleaming-eyed. How swiftly and deftly, when that day should come, if ever it should come, she would raise her little flattened head, and strike! Heaven help her victim! For so

sharp and subtle was she that she was not of those who miss their mark!

Corry came out to greet them on the steps. All his embarrassment had passed. He stood rubbing his hands with complacency.

"Why, you've got rouge-spots on your cheeks," he told her, pleased. "The drive has done you heaps of good. And you, Uncle Chris, did you enjoy it? Come in to tea. It's just ready."

Malet and he repaired to the drawing-room, where everything, as spic and span as new pins, bespoke a mistress's administrative vigilance. The table was spread with good and tempting things, and a kettle, burnished like a mirror, reflected the firelight and the warm tints of the room, the while it sang of tea.

Carry had slipped upstairs, however, immediately on coming in. And punctual as she was ordinarily, they waited some minutes before she reappeared.

"She is reconnoitering the new patient," Peter said with a sly smile.

He rubbed his hands again. Malet read in the action self-congratulation that for once he had defeated her sharp wits.

She returned in her toque and coat, showing that she had not spent the time in altering her dress. And the light and rouge-spots the wind had whipped to eyes and cheeks had given place to a brooding that confessed defeat. She cast a gleam at Peter, which expressed that she did not mean to sit quiet under defeat, however.

Then, slipping off her sacque, she began to make tea with that lithe precision Malet never failed to note in her.

Going later to his room, he met Mr. Thackeray coming down. The little man was beaming all over his face. Seeing Malet, he quickened his pace to a run, and met him with hands outstretched.

"Congratulate me on a flash of genius!" he cried with fervor. "The thought occurred to me this morning that when I have changed the Christian name of that incomparable lady to Rebecca, I must change her surname. My dear Sir, when you come to think of it, just think of such a woman trammelled with the name of 'Sharp.' Sharp! A name one might give to a kitchen-maid or under-footman! Quite unsuited to that noble heart and brain. It really is astounding how in the flush of creation even the greatest of us can be guilty of stupendous blunders."

Malet agreeing with him, was moving on when he added in a confidential whisper:

"Do not go up, Mr. Mallock, if you do not wish to encounter Lady Sarah. The poor lady has"—he tapped his red head with an air of commiseration—"a bee in her bonnet, you must know—something about a cow and milk. I'm not quite clear about it, finding no time to spare from my great work to listen to her silly chatter. These cases are very sad. They distress one. I don't think Corry should mix men like you and me with persons of defective intellect. It's not right of him, not fair to us."

Nevertheless, as Malet left him, he saw with sympathy that in the poor man's eye which betrayed that he more than suspected the truth, but fenced against it—lest he go mad indeed!

On the landing above, he found Lady Sarah, her spare small body craned inquisitively over the banisters, watching the great man's descent.

She greeted him with some effusion, and it seemed confusion too.

"Ah, Duke," she said. "So pleased to meet you! You've been yachting, I see. You're as brown as a berry. Do you know we have stopping in this house quite a remarkable man, and an agreeable one, but unfortunately he is not quite right," she tapped her

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narrow forehead—"mentally, you know. The poor man is under the delusion that Becky Sharp—you've read *Vanity Fair* perhaps, although I know you're not a reading man—well, he thinks Becky Sharp a perfect heroine, a sort of Joan of Arc. It is quite an aberration. How sad these mental afflictions are!"

## CHAPTER X

### IN THE DUTCH GARDEN

**M**ALET received a second invitation to Travenhoe.

He found Lady Lygon alone. They talked of books and other things, the subject of her distress remaining unbroached.

Before he left, she said,

"To-morrow Cyril goes to Eton. I shall feel his loss terribly. Will you come in when you have time, and cheer my loneliness?"

So he fell readily into a habit of spending afternoons with her. At first he would take a book with him, or a Review, to serve for apology. But finding himself welcomed, his diffidence wore off, no other apology being needed than his own good company.

And presently, he grew emboldened to thread his way frequently through those grounds where on his first evening here the firs had wept and tossed their heavy hair like woeful women, and thence to a delightful Dutch garden which was her favorite resort.

The garden was walled in by a yew hedge, quaintly clipped. It had broad flagged terraces, with green grass springing in the space between the flags, giving charming effects of picturesque neglect and "by-the-world-forgot." There was a lake, where reeds and irises swayed softly, curtsying graciously to one another in a life-long water-minuet; trim, prim. flower-borders, showing from a distance like handsome mosaics, the

monotony of their precision being relieved by box trees shaped to sphere and pyramid.

Entering, one seemed to drop by way of the broad marble terraces into as many bygone centuries, where Time had walked with slow and stately tread, counting the quiet minutes of the calm hours, like a woman telling the beads of a beloved rosary, holding each fondly and long between her fingers before reluctantly slipping it into the past.

In this delightful place they sat in a luxurious summer-house, with windows overlooking all the beauties. And here their chance acquaintance—if any momentous happening in life may be regarded as chance—mellowed quickly into friendship.

The grief to which her reddened eyes and pallor told him she was yielding in the first days after her boy's going, submerged the pangs of jealousy.

Moved and softened, she was in a mind, he thought, to re-shape her attitude toward life, perhaps to adopt the kinder and more philosophic bearing he had counseled.

Sometimes he read to her. She listened with clasped hands, on which at times some tears would fall; or she worked upon delicate embroideries.

There were intervals of talk, when they discussed a passage he had read, or a thought that came to one or the other of them. Silent and rather shy in general society, Malet was an interesting talker in sympathetic company.

He pleased her with gossip about writers and artists, admiration for whose work made her wish to learn something of their personality. Many of these were his friends and acquaintances, and she seemed never to tire of his lip-biographies—impressionist sketches of life and of character.

He smiled at her disappointment to find dull enough and uneventful the stories of these who created such fine stories for imaginary beings.

"You must distinguish always between the man and his art," he told her. "The tenor who sings you a passionate love-song, fit to crack your heart-strings by its pain and pathos, is generally a man incapable of feeling a grand passion. It is so with other great artists. They put their souls into their work, and have little or nothing left (except dregs sometimes) for their emotions. It is the dumb man and woman, they who have no gift of expression, whose emotions play havoc with them. Show me a man with a talent or a hobby, and you show me one who will never die and be eaten by worms for the love of a woman. Such men can always escape the high tides of their feelings by climbing a pole of their brain."

"It is grander, surely, to face the tide—even to be drowned in it."

"Grander no doubt, more splendidly human. But some of the finest creative work has been done when the artists were driven by tidal passions high up intellectual poles."

"One can understand putting one's soul into a great talent, but it is extraordinary that people can throw their hearts and souls into hobbies—into hunting and golf and bridge and social functions."

"They cannot," he said, "when their hearts and souls are life-size. The hobby is the mark of the small, lopsided mind, or of the cold heart. Properly proportioned and balanced persons see these things in their proper perspective, as little channels for the outlet of superfluous energy merely, not as the mainstream of living."

"And yet," she said, sighing, "it must be a relief to feel the joy some persons find in bridge and golf. Because these are available distractions."

On the point of saying more, she closed her lips sharply. He suspected that for years she had been practicing such habits of self-repression.

He saw that the beautiful curves of her lips were



losing their fullness, were straightening out in hard lines, as a result of frequent lockings of them on her thoughts and feelings. There were foreshadowings of fretful grooves about the angles of her mouth.

Fashioned by nature for love and emotion, her temperament was withering beneath the blight of lovelessness. Life had turned only its bleak northern face to her, sterilizing her more vital impulses.

Responding to his sympathy and comradeship, now and again some bud of nature peeped for a moment through her fence of habit. A smile, a laugh, a flush of color to her cheeks, and once a roguish glance from her dark eyes, showed him a loving, lovely woman in the marble one.

He thought of a lake sheeted over with ice, looking through which one saw at times a nymph all warm and rosy, a creature of charm and mystery, of tears and laughter—one made for play and love and sunlight, yet doomed to live lonely and frost-bound. Love had conjured the woman into being, and then had locked her up in ice.

He suspected that Lygon and others of her world saw no deeper than the surface, and missed the enchanted nymph beneath.

Only the man she loved could free her. And the man she loved was her husband; who loved Mrs. Ferrers; who, in her turn, possibly loved some other man,—the commonest of all the baffling situations in the game of cross-purposes called Life!

Once she broke the silence regarding her trouble.

"I have taken your advice," she told him. "I have decided not to leave my husband, as I had intended. If he wishes to release himself—it lies in his own hands." She added tensely: "Mrs. Ferrers is coming next week. And I shall receive her."

There was in her large and quiet eyes a magnanimity

that touched him. His pupil had gone beyond her lesson. His had been a counsel of reason and justice, with a spice of diplomacy in it. For he had thought that in a kinder and gentler demeanor lay her only hope of winning back Lygon's affection.

He saw now that, despite a clear and clever brain and despite her cold exterior, she was of the sort which rules its conduct by its heart; not by its head.

And the course of tolerance he had addressed to her reason she had referred to her heart, and her heart had approved—generously yielding that forgiveness which not only remits past injuries, but views with patience those to come.

Her large sad eyes transfigured to a noble courage that patience of woman at which the modern fashion is to scoff, a patience one sees shining steadfastly through pain, like a lamp through mist, in the eyes of some women, and of those dumb creatures which suffer meekly, as though meekly deeming that whatsoever is—is best.

But he saw, too, in her the death of hope. She wore the air of one who ceases to struggle, because she has ceased to hope for advantage from struggle.

"It is very noble of you," he said gently.

She shook her head and smiled sadly.

"Only poor-spirited, perhaps!"

"No. It is the higher wisdom, which realizes that though we may rule our conduct to others, we cannot rule others by our conduct."

Before he left, she invited him to make one of the house-party of the approaching week.

"My husband has asked Professor Glubb, the famous archæologist," she told him. "The house-party is made up to rehearse a Pageant we are giving in the summer, and Professor Glubb is to help us out with our mediæval customs and costumes. The others of the party are rather frivolous, and the poor man may feel lost. Do come and help us with him. I am qualifying to be his

hostess," she added smiling, "by struggling through his last book. I do not make much headway with it."

Malet accepted, greatly pleased. But to tell the truth, he was far more taken by the prospect of meeting Mrs. Ferrers than by that of meeting Glubb, whom he knew slightly and knew as a bore.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE IRRESISTIBLE MRS. FERRERS

CARRY had been sadly vexed by Lady Lygon's hospitalities to Malet.

"It's very rude of her," she said, "to ask you there continually, and to absolutely ignore us. Especially as I already know her slightly. It would be only civil of her to call or to invite us when she invites our guest. I suppose she thinks we are beneath her. Though I can't see why she should think a doctor inferior to an author."

"He is not, of course," Malet protested. "She is not the woman to make such distinctions. She invites me because she is good enough to like my books."

"Well, I don't like all of them; I think that one in which the heroine runs away from her husband is quite improper. I don't see how she can like that. Besides, she might invite us because of you, if she really wanted not to slight us."

Malet repeated his conviction that no slight was meant.

"Only think," he said, "what a large circle she must have already!"

This, supplying a reason, had mollified her. But on learning of his invitation to join the brilliant house-party she had heard was expected at Travenhoe, her vexation knew no bounds.

"It is a perfect insult!" she exclaimed. For two whole days she vouchsafed little more than a chilly "Yes" or "No" to him.

Elfie was confined to her room with a cold; Mr. Thackeray was too much occupied with Becky to come down; Lady Sarah still mistook him for the Duke of Hertfordshire, and took him to task for corrupting his friends and the general public by his incorrigible racing habits; while the little cloud of mystery with which Corry's manœuvres had surrounded the new occupant of No. Seven had become a dull impenetrable fog, Malet being unable to hear word or catch a glimpse of her.

Things at "Roseberry" being thus flat and unprofitable save for Corry's friendliness, Malet hailed Thursday for the welcome diversion it brought in his visit to Travenhoe, and the stimulating prospect of meeting "the irresistible Mrs. Ferrers," as her world styled her.

He timed his arrival for some minutes earlier than that of the guests who were coming by special train from town. So, he reflected with his native diffidence, his less important entry would have been made before the attentions of his host and hostess were needed for guests of greater consequence and longer standing claim.

Lygon received him in the friendliest fashion.

"You'll be a perfect godsend to old Glubb," he said. "Wonder I dared to ask the old chap, as we have no other learned persons coming—except Mrs. Ferrers, of course," he added. "You have met Mrs. Ferrers?"

Malet, with a sense of "whom not to know is to argue oneself unknown," was forced to confess himself a stranger to her.

Lygon, who seemed not yet wholly to have got the bearings of this new acquaintance, showed as much surprise to find a famous and intelligent man who had not met Mrs. Ferrers, as Malet was surprised to hear of her as learned.

The information further quickened his curiosity regarding her. His preconceived impression of her as a smart and handsome, shallow worldling, required to be

reconstructed, it seemed. Certainly he had not thought of her as learned.

The door was flung wide by a footman magnificent in powder and livery, and a laughing, chattering crowd of twenty modish persons of both sexes trooped in like an invading army, and took possession of the room. Most of them—the women at all events—were talking at the top of their voices, emphatically asseverating that they had had a most delightful journey, and each striving so to pitch her key that her particular assurance should be heard above those of her fellows.

Malet's impression for some time was that two-thirds of the party were women. He discovered presently that this was a mistake, however, and that in point of fact his sex was in the majority, there being one man over and above the number of women. (This one readily resolved himself into old Glubb.)

The preponderance of the sex called gentle is aggravated by the fact that half a dozen women of the present day may be readily mistaken for a dozen women of an earlier decade, or, save for their attire, for a dozen and a half of modern males.

Clothes have something to do with it, of course, huge hats bedight with feathers enough for a hearse, sacques and mantles made of fierce, furry beasts, muffs big enough to hold a good-sized infant (although, be it hastily said, never put to a purpose so unmodish), rows on rows of defunct creatures, slung, all heads and tails, about the neck, like the bag of a keeper who has been out ferreting—all these allied to movements and manners, neurotically restless and forceful, suggest comparisons between the modern fashionable woman in her feathers and her war-paint, and the Indian brave in his.

Tea with luxurious embellishments, champagne and liqueurs, choice fruits and appetizing savories being now brought in with a flourish as of trumpets by a number of gorgeously appareled, preternaturally tall

footmen, the guests fell upon it with more of gusto than of manners. For this particular party belonged to a very smart and rapid set, which in its cult of "form" exaggerated form—tricking out the gentle art of doing nothing in so strenuous a guise of doing something, that although the idlest it was the busiest set in the world.

Malet, bringing new eyes to bear upon this fashionable crowd—for he went but little into society, and that he frequented was more cultivated than it was modish—saw that its loud laughter and overdone animation were efforts to conceal boredom, saw that it smiled hard lest any should detect the tired or sour lines about its mouth, that it forced perpetual movement to hide jaded states of mind and body.

It is absurd to call such "leisured persons," who work so much harder at that they style pleasure than the working classes work at work. The true leisured classes—the salt of the earth—are the cultured and reposeful, who find time to realize and to enjoy the more delicate values of life. Because not what we do, but the impressions and emotions we derive from what we do—is living.

Malet was amused to look on and to listen, although unqualified to take part in the table-talk over his tea.

He had not been to the Duchess of Oldcastle's ball the previous night, nor at the State concert some evenings earlier. He had no views in consequence upon the subjects of the supper or the flowers, nor on that of Lady X.'s extraordinary behavior with Captain A., nor of that perisher D.'s maladroitness about his wife to Lord W. He could hazard no guess as to why Mrs. Anstruther had struck Sir Astley Wildoats with her riding crop at the last meet of the Pytcheley, nor whether B. and C. would bolt before Y. returned from India. He did not know even that Y. had already started on his homeward journey, nor that he had re-

ceived an anonymous wireless telling of the shocking exposé at Windermere House. And what was more, he did not care a brass button about any of these happenings, further than as they threw sidelights upon human nature, a point of view which seemed to have no value for these others, to whom the purely personal bearing was the only one that mattered.

Accordingly, he withdrew to the background and occupied his hands in turning the pages of an Album of Beauty, his wits in evading old Glubb, and his eyes in seeking Mrs. Ferrers.

He decided upon the most striking-looking woman present, a tall, dark, handsome creature with black hair banded low upon her brows, a green-and-scarlet parrot rampant in the front of her Oriental turban, and a black satin harem skirt revealing transparent-hosed ankles and a jeweled anklet. She sat wreathing her painted lips and rolling her big eyes at Lygon, who, drinking his tea beside her, seemed to be giving her his whole attention.

This would be Mrs. Ferrers, Malet thought—this person who might well have been discarded from the harem of a Turkish pasha because she had become too haremish. He knew his sex, and the schoolboy in them which kept many of them all their lives too fond of toffee—odd fellows that these Britishers were!—finding relaxation from the leather-belted, cotton-shirted, neutral-tinted women of their set in the other extreme of paint and patchouli.

His host dropped lower in his estimation. For there is no such sure and subtle key to a man's character as is the woman he admires. Malet had framed an axiom regarding this: "Show me the woman a man likes, and I will tell you what manner of man he is!"

Lygon, feeling Malet's eye upon him, now looked up. Seeing him solitary and—as perhaps it smote his conscience as host to see—neglected, he excused himself



to his sultana and made for Glubb. Glubb, who, as Malet had noted with amusement, had been as carefully evading him as he had been evading Glubb, was just then elaborately boring a yellow-haired woman in gray, a moth-like creature diaphanously clad, who, twirling helplessly beneath his steely gaze, suggested a poor little yellow butterfly transfixed by the pin of an entomologist.

Not humane enough to suffer in her stead, and divining Lygon's intention to turn Glubb upon him, Malet sidled off, with feigned unconsciousness, toward his hostess. She moved up and began to talk, whereupon Lygon, abandoning his intention, returned to his houri, leaving the yellow moth still twirling on the lady-killer's gaze. For Glubb, a clever archæologist, was a vain and tiresome man.

Lady Lygon was looking lovely in a dress which to Malet's simplicity seemed simple, but which was in reality a work of art, a tunic of oyster chiffon above an under-dress of exquisite blue; with steel embroideries.

She seemed to stand apart, serene and distinguished, from the women round her, the ultra-modish gowns and striving for effect which characterized the greater number of them, giving them somewhat the appearance of a *troupe* of actresses being entertained by a great lady.

The chiefest privilege of belonging to the high world is that the assured position it confers frees the privileged from all need of strain, so making possible the poise and repose which are at the same time the mark of the highest breeding and the highest womanly grace. For to shoulder and push implies that one has not yet arrived.

Malet, contrasting Lady Lygon with the odalisque engrossing her husband, could not repress a feeling of contempt for him. These were tinsel toils indeed!

"Do you know any of these people?" his hostess asked him, seeming to ally herself with him rather than with them.

"I know some of them," he said, "from seeing them in public life, not otherwise."

He pointed out a noted General, an ex-Viceroy, a peer who had recently divorced his wife, and a handsome young Under-Secretary who had that battered look some handsome men wear as a result of having been pelted hard with women's hearts.

She supplemented his information.

"The fair little woman listening so attentively to Professor Glubb is General Talboy's second wife, an American heiress. The red-haired woman in mauve is Lady Violet, the wife of the handsome Under-Secretary and a daughter of the Duke of Avon—you have perhaps seen her dance. She dances for charity, and—the saying is not mine—forgets to put on her cloak."

She named others, concluding with:

"The woman my husband is talking to is the Duchess of Skye."

"I was thinking——" Malet said, and caught himself up short.

He had said too much, however.

"Oh no," she returned, with an air of repudiation, "Mrs. Ferrers has not come yet. She is motoring down." She added quietly, "It is plain you have not grasped my husband's character."

There was pride in her voice—pride of that husband that the case was not so bad as this, and a further pride that told him she could not have tolerated such a rival for an hour.

Malet saw then that the attention Lygon was paying to her Grace of Skye was a cover for preoccupation; saw that his eyes kept glancing to the door. His fresh color had paled. There was a suggestion of breathlessness about him.

At last the door opened, and a servant announced with some impressiveness:

"Mrs. Ferrers!"

In that moment, all the hopes Malet had been fostering dropped to earth. He had a sense of them lying about him like bright leaves shriveled; for he saw not a beautiful woman merely, but a unique and enthralling personality, the sort of woman who makes history and unmakes civilizations. In that moment all the other men and women in the room became mere walkers-on, persons to form a background for the real actors in the Lygon drama—he and she and Mrs. Ferrers. And as Lygon had gone down in his esteem when he had supposed him victim to the odalisque, now he went up in his esteem when he saw the quality of his conqueror.

The trio stood out in relief from all the frivolers about them, showing both in brain and body as being upon a higher evolutionary level, with their battle of life to be fought upon the higher ground of their finer and further evolved humanity.

Lady Lygon, who before her rival's entry had seemed a trifle indeterminate perhaps, now, with the coming of her rival, took up her position in the foreground of the drama.

Malet, all vigilance, saw by the instant of profound gravity which supplanted the smiles he had been lavishing upon the Duchess, and by the momentary blazing of his eyes as they met those of Mrs. Ferrers, that Lygon was no common philanderer, but was, on the contrary, one capable of an unswerving fidelity to his true mate. And at once the drama became of vital and absorbing interest.

For of these two women, both so beautiful and clever, and yet so different, which was the man's true mate—his wedded wife or that other?

Lady Lygon, moving away from him to greet her guest, left him free to resume his rôle of onlooker. And he lost no tone or glance of this opening scene of the play. Or rather, to state the case accurately, he lost no tone or glance of the principal actress in it. Later he

was to learn that this power of riveting attention on herself was one of Mrs. Ferrers' talents.

She was tall and reed-like, too slender for womanliness had it not been that she was clothed about with grace as though with curves, so that one had no sooner remarked the beauty of her face, than he noted the perfect set and turn of her head upon her throat and delicate shoulders. Her complexion was singularly pale, a pallor not of anæmia nor of any other form of ill-health, but of nervous intensity, so that it showed almost luminous within its frame of red-brown hair.

This, which was of the rich mysterious color of seaweed seen through water, was, in defiance of the fashion of the day, coiled close about her little shapely head. Her nose was firm and finely modeled, and would have been a shade too dominant for the fine oval of her face had it not been that the exquisite whiteness of her skin etherealized every feature. Her mouth was large, but the rather full and mobile lips were so sensitive and beautifully curved, moreover so delicately tinted, and their movements so flexile, as to make lesser mouths look inadequate, and painted ones appear to scream.

And yet, on coming nearer, all her beauty showed as a mere setting for the eyes, which caught and held the whole attention. Large, yet deeply set beneath her long brows, they were a shade too close together. This which in a face less beautiful would have been a fault, in hers enhanced the beauty, lending a look of power and concentration to it.

The irides, chameleon-like, changed color with her moods, were gray and limpid, and suggested sunlit water, or were bright and crystalline, showing like agate with mysterious green veinings in it. The lashes, long and velvet-black, made one think of bulrushes about a pool. Contrasting finely with the startling whiteness of her skin, their blackness may, and yet may not, have been artificial. For in a beautiful woman's face the

artist, Nature, is seen at her supremest, and obtains her effects by laying on her pigments sometimes according to the law of perfect harmony, sometimes in exquisite contrast.

The difference between beauty and mere prettiness is made by the woman behind it, and behind and illumining all her fine modeling and color, Mrs. Ferrers' personality was seen and felt glowing like a lamp. She wore no dead beasts on her, but was dressed in charming taste, being clad in a gown of mouse-colored velvet with a mantle, half coat, half cloak, revealing chiffon linings of the agate-green of her eyes. Her beaver motor-bonnet, of the same shade as her gown, was cottage-brimmed and lined with sea-green silk, making a frame for the face within it, and with the sheeny veil she had thrown back, surrounding it with a greenish haze so that she looked like a sea-nymph gazing through her native element.

It was said of her that although she was never in the fashion, she was never out of it, for everything she wore showed as the very latest word in dress. Being too clever and possessed of a taste too fine to dress like a fashion plate, before ordering her clothes she first passed in review all that the modistes had to show her, and then, with lightning quickness and unerring taste, skimmed the cream of all and whipped it into an original creation, which her dressmakers rendered into a "confection." As a dressmaker she would herself have won fame and fortune, having a very genius for clothes.

Lygon, nearest to the door, was first to meet and to greet her, interrupting her on her way to his wife, who having moved some paces forward stood now awaiting her.

There was nothing apparent in their greeting beyond that of a pleased and courteous host and a pleased and cordially welcomed guest exchanging friendly amenities. The same smile with which she had greeted her host she

renewed to greet her hostess. But Malet, who was near, saw that her eyes, which had been gray and fluent on the former, became green and agate when they turned upon the latter.

Lady Lygon received her gracefully but not effusively, her demeanor being an admirable compromise between cordiality and simple courtesy.

He saw that a number of eyes besides his own watched the meeting with half-veiled or with open curiosity. For as his hostess had told him, this was the first time she had received her rival in her own house. And although Lygon's infatuation was common talk, even in a circle which is incredulous of Platonic affection, the question as to whether these two were actually lovers remained still a baffling and piquant problem.

Mrs. Ferrers added to her other charms a voice of silver, sweet and clear and liquid as a bell, and she so modulated it and pronounced her words with so fine an articulation as to endow even her most trivial sayings with values.

To her hostess's conventional inquiry whether she were not fatigued by her long motor journey, she replied:

"On the contrary. The air was so fresh and the country is looking so beautiful that I feel only refreshed."

"So glad," her hostess murmured. "Did you enjoy Aix?"

Mrs. Ferrers shrugged a delicate shoulder.

"Not in the least. It was London over again—the same people, the same gossip, the same bridge; even some of the same frocks."

"Well, one knows what to expect."

"Yes, but somehow one always expects the unexpected."

It was but a conventional interchange, a quick fencing with words in order to disguise thoughts. Yet even to a casual observer it might have been clear that Mrs. Ferrers was mistress of the position. She wore no airs

of triumph—she was too subtle for that—but her tranquil buoyancy, even a trace of gracious deference, showed that she fully realized her strength.

Lady Lygon, despite her composure, betrayed just a hint of tension: such a hint as is seen in one who plays a losing game with courage.

Malet, seeing them together, noted a distinguishing trait which further set them apart from the other handsome women in the room. The beauty and the charm of both were essentially Twentieth-Century. Widely differing, each was nevertheless, for her type, the last and highest product of our evolutionary phase.

Owing to a wave of decadence which has recently swept over us, much of the beauty of our modern women is degenerate, a reversion to an earlier and essentially primitive type, the beauty of the courtesan.

Though sometimes intellectual, there is in it nothing of moral nor of spiritual beauty. It does not express the aspirations or ideals of the age. On the contrary, in an age of social emancipation, a large contingent of our women have reverted in face, in dress, and in demeanor, to the *demi-mondaine*, a crude and cheap reversion which is deplorable when we consider the pure and lovely type of beauty English womanhood had once attained, and still of course attains, although with ever-diminishing frequency.

It is like the quenching of a great light which had stood as beacon to our human progress, this substitution of the cheap and spurious beauty of the lady of the ballet—the lure of crudest sex—for the highly evolved and noble beauty which once made Englishwomen notable.

These two were too clever to tax their powers unduly.

Not only were they playing the game against one another, they were playing it in full view of their world, and neither wished to risk dropping and being seen to drop the ball for one unguarded instant.

At the first sense, accordingly, that their forced smiles and interchanges were beginning to flag, Lady Lygon made a diversion by introducing Malet, who stood near, to Mrs. Ferrers.

Lygon had now joined Glubb and Mrs. Talboys, while the Duchess of Skye had descended upon Foulger, the handsome Under-Secretary.

Mrs. Ferrers showed herself frankly pleased to make Malet's acquaintance.

"You are one of the few modern writers of fiction," she told him, "who understand women from any but 'the eternal feminine' or 'the revolting female' point of view. And the eternal feminine is an eternal cat, while the revolting female is generally not a woman at all. The revolutions that *real* women have been making through the ages have been as silent as the tides—and as irresistible."

"You are a suffragist, nevertheless?"

"I am. But what we need is men rather than measures, and it is women who make men. Men are not forced into being good by Acts of Parliament, but are led there by acts of grace. All moral progress is a matter of women's personal influence—influence upon their children and their menkind. For it is ours which is the superior sex, Mr. Malet."

Her eyes, which had been green and agate, became gray again, and liquid. She reinforced their magnetic charm by a smile so ravishing that straightway, without a single struggle, he went down before her, captive and bound.

"One is grateful to you also—deeply so," she added, "because you do not strip us, body and function, to the public eye. I think it was Dickens who guessed that the anonymous writer under the pen-name George Eliot must be a woman, because no man of the taste and subtlety to have written *Adam Bede* would have described Hetty's undressing as was done in this book.



Apply this criticism to some modern masculine writers, who do not hesitate to deal with the physiology and pathology of my sex with the brutal candor of the medical case-book, but without its justification!"

## CHAPTER XII

### MALET'S DEFECTION

**I**N his keenness to renew acquaintance with the lovely stranger—an acquaintance of no longer than minutes, for Lygon had swooped upon and carried her off with some others to see an orchid-house he had been stocking with unique specimens—Malet was first in the drawing-room before dinner.

When he had known her a little longer he would discover that she was never to be found among early arrivals, but like the principal actress upon other stages, delayed her coming always until persons of less consequence had warmed the social atmosphere.

Those few minutes had sufficed to show her, however, as the most remarkable and captivating woman he had met. Beautiful as she was at first sight, her beauty was enhanced to the superlative degree in conversation, her eyes glowing like sea-green jewels, her fine features illumined by the phosphorescent flashes of her clever brain.

Turning to him, doubtless with relief from the constraint of her talk with Lady Lygon, she had unbent to such a mood of charming spontaneity that later, recalling the subtle witty sallies which in their brief colloquy had scintillated from it, he thought of the brain within the lovely little red-brown head as a brilliant diamond, clear as light and many-faceted.

He found her quite amazing. For over and beyond her intellect and looks, her personality was signally magnetic, stimulating, provocative, subjugating. She

seemed to unite in one woman the charms and talents and accomplishments of ten, and carried these to higher values than he had yet known.

Report had told him of her as a linguist, an artist, a writer, a speaker; had told him she sang and played charmingly and danced divinely; that she had exhibited a picture at the Academy; had written a novel; had spoken in public; in short, that she was an Admirable Crichton in petticoats so adorably fashioned that nobody ever caught even a glimpse of blue stockings.

It was small wonder, then, that men went down like ninepins before her, bowled over by their own hearts.

And yet with all her attractions and admirers, albeit the finger of doubt was often enough pointed at her, it had never been able to lay itself upon a slip or indiscretion she had made—over and beyond, that is, the indiscretion of having and of retaining admirers. For the world knows that men soon drop away from a quest wherein no rewards are to be given, as they do from one in which the prizes have been already bestowed.

Mrs. Ferrers, unique in so many ways however, and most of all in her baffling and alluring remoteness, might well have been unique in a rare gift of so stimulating the imagination that the men of her train never wholly lost hope that one day she would step down from her heights and play Dian to their Endymion. And for all that men take readily all that comes to hand, the only things they really value are the things beyond their reach.

Accordingly, in an age when they can get for the asking so much as they want and far more than they value, Mrs. Ferrers, with provocative elusiveness, kept herself for ever out of reach, constituting that beautiful self the little more and how much it was, the little less, and the world away!

Nothing confers power as does a reputation for power; and when a prince of the blood was known to have attempted suicide on her account, she had in a day so

sprung into vogue that even in our prosaic age her cavaliers did derring deeds for the prestige of driving her to Hurlingham or of being seen to exchange a few words with her at the Opera.

For three whole years she had been the most popular woman, and the most noted wit and beauty of her century. She was *persona grata* at several Courts, and because of her face, her clothes, her brilliant conversation, and beyond all because she was the fashion, hostesses smiled and flattered, fought and bit to secure her for their functions. For personages who could not be lured to parties by the baits of Melba or Tetrizzini, either of whom could be heard by paying in specie without paying in boredom, would go anywhere if only it were known that Mrs. Ferrers would be present.

And wheresoever she was, she was always the brilliant center of an eager throng, the guests hustling and shouldering one another, careless of manners in their keenness to see for themselves how she was looking, what she was wearing, to whom she was talking, what had been her last saying, what she thought of this, of that, and of the other. In a word, she had become so much a craze that to be seen walking or talking with or being smiled upon by her, conferred social distinction.

Moreover, she was a sphinx. She wielded all the arts and practised all the wiles that make for popularity—charm and candor, flattery and rudeness, warmth and coldness, but beyond all unexpectedness—and she wielded them with so much tact and fitness, that whether she smiled or frowned, unbent or turned a chilly shoulder, all but added to her power and reputation.

Her sphinx-like quality lay in the fact that nobody could discover whether her methods were calculated and designed, or whether they were spontaneous and the outcome merely of her whim. She was sphinx-like, too, and maddening in giving no hint or clue as to whether behind her changeful charm and cleverness there were a

human heart and human weaknesses, tears and laughter, pity and ruth, a passionate soul and yearning impulses.

If she felt ill or unhappy, she did not yield to cravings for sympathy and betray her disabilities in bedroom confidences. She seldom talked about herself, and when she did so it was never of her weaknesses. Even her intimates never so far penetrated her reserves as to learn whether she suffered from dyspepsias or other ills, which afford many women so much pleasure and comfort in confiding.

Nobody had seen her with a cold, nor had heard of her as suffering from influenza. In her methods of control, she resembled Monica Lygon, but Monica's control was far less signal, and moreover it took the form of self-repression, while Mrs. Ferrer's superb self-mastery was used for self-expression. Whether or not it was her true self she expressed, nobody could tell. One could only suspect that it was not, unless he were able to believe her possessed of all the charms and strengths of mortal woman, and none of her disabilities.

Whether pose or nature however, her control made a species of super-woman of her, and made people a little afraid of her—always a spur to their consideration. She was never guilty of meanness, of temper, of ill-nature, nor of other lapses from her super-state. Nor though she sharpened an edged wit upon them, did she speak ill of her acquaintances—not even of her best friends.

Malet, his mind full to overflowing with her, of what he had seen and had heard of her, seated himself now near the door, in order that he might have a full and uninterrupted view of her before she should be swallowed up by her admirers. For the present, lover of the sex as he was, he was feeling it a privilege to live beneath the same roof with a creature so superlative.

His interest in the drama of which she was heroine was further heightened by his conviction that whatso-

ever her world might suspect, Lygon and she were not lovers in that sense in which the world understands lovers. There was about him an air of nervous tension and of passionate unrest, such as was never seen in love that had fulfilled itself. He saw that the man's nature was strained to breaking-point, that every look and word and movement of her lashed in him surges of passionate blood which wellnigh carried him off his feet. He saw that for this reason he did not trust himself in her company for longer than minutes, and that before he approached her he first accoutred himself in a temperamental coat of mail.

She seemed to divine his stress, and forebore to add to it, whilst in his company sheathing her glances and tempering her graces to less provocative degrees—whether from compunction or from a fine fastidiousness which shrank from bringing eyes upon them, Malet could not decide.

As he now sat with his gaze upon the door by which he expected her to enter, Lady Lygon came in by a lower door, and had moved up beside him before he had seen her.

She wore the dress of white velvet and old lace she had worn on that evening when she had come to her new resolution. Her eyes were calm, although a trifle tragic, and the quiet of her manner was the quiet of despair.

With a sense of guilty compunction, he recalled his thoughts from their admiring preoccupation with her rival, and seeing the situation from her standpoint again, he acquiesced in her hopelessness. The odds were unfair. On the one hand was a woman merely, albeit a noble and a beautiful one, on the other was a lesser goddess. And the woman was heavily handicapped by her emotions, while the goddess was, to all appearance, free of impediment, winged and shod with the confidence which comes of long success.

Monica stood silent beside him for a half-minute, regarding him with eyes so dark and woeful that his sense of guilt increased. In the mood of fervid admiration he had been indulging he dared not speak of the rival concerning whom her eyes put wistful questions, although her lips were too proud to speak them.

Then, as he remained silent,

"I have just heard from Cyril," she said. "He writes with such forced cheerfulness that I read mother-sickness between the lines."

"He is sure to feel that at first, of course, until he settles down."

She shook her head.

"Nobody and nothing should be able to take the place of his mother in a boy's heart."

"True! but to feel the loss of her should increase her value for him."

There was a pause. Again her eyes put questions. It seemed that she longed and yet feared to hear of Mrs. Ferrers from one whose opinion she valued as he valued his. And yet, perhaps, she hoped against hope that he might have gleaned from the situation some ray of light wherewith to comfort her.

He had no comfort to offer, however. And kind though he was and his sympathies enlisted on her side, even then his attention wandered from her; for from where they stood there became visible and audible, through a half-opened door, a brilliant crowd upon the broad electric-lighted staircase. The house-party was descending in a body, having met and lingered on a spacious lobby, through the great windows of which, looking westward, they had been gazing at a crescent moon, the women with much talk and laughter turning the money they had put into their bridge-bags for the night's play, and invoking luck upon their cards.

And behind and unobserved by them, having only just quitted her room, came Mrs. Ferrers, superb in a

gown of white silk crêpe and gold tissues, a little Juliet cap of netted gold upon her auburn hair. Later, Malet admired the splendid emeralds she wore this evening, necklet and bracelets and tiara, and during his visit he saw that each evening brought a change of jewels, all of the greatest value and exquisite in quality and taste.

Ferrers had been a rich banker and a successful speculator, who after two years of marriage had died—considerately, it was said—leaving her a young and lovely and a wealthy widow. It was said that the marriage had been as unhappy as the couple had been ill-assorted. He had married her for her beauty, she had married him for his wealth, and in neither case had the motive proved adequate for happiness.

Despite many and dazzling opportunities, she had shown no disposition to replace him, having been widowed for some eight years.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MEET

DINNER was served at a large round table, and, as happens so readily and agreeably at round tables, conversation became general from time to time. Or, to speak precisely, Mrs. Ferrers and some other, now the clever Under-Secretary, now the Viceroy, and once, for a few minutes, Glubb, engaged in a battle of wits, while the rest of the company held their tongues to listen.

The law of precedence had obliged Lygon to take in the Duchess of Skye. She had changed her afternoon trousers for evening ones, revealed by split seams of a tunic which would have been gorgeous had it not been so skimpy as to suggest that the costliness of its material had led her dressmaker to omit a back breadth.

Lygon did his best to look happy beneath her blandishments, and to play with as good a grace as possible the game to which her bold eyes challenged him. Malet, however, detected leaden boredom behind the supple smiles the man of the world exacts from his features, long practice whereof leaves the same grimness of jaw as comes to the face of the soldier, whose strategics have been more effective although no more fatiguing.

Mrs. Ferrers possessed the waning art of conversation, which is not only the art of talking but that also of inspiring others to talk. The mere good talker, who holds forth—no matter how engagingly—while others listen, is not a conversationist, nor is he generally popu-

lar. For though persons may be pleased to listen, nine out of ten of them prefer to talk.

Malet, who had never before been in quite such socially distinguished company, nor had eaten quite so many foods and fruits served out of season and served in such luxurious fashion, had never perhaps enjoyed the luxury of gratifying so many tastes and senses at the same time.

The handsome old dining-hall, with its noble oak ; its ancestral portraits by master hands reinforcing the company by many a dignified presence ; its famous painted ceiling, with the loves of heathen personages portrayed with so much pagan candor that it was well they did not come into perspective unless one lay upon the floor ; the men in armor set at intervals along the walls seeming to safeguard the feast from foes without ; the tall servants in their handsome livery ; the gold plate and glass and flowers ; and beyond all the beauty, and where not beautiful the exquisite turn-out of the women, the faultless dressing of their hair, the elegance and distinction of their clothes, their rare jewels, their white and shapely, daintily tended hands, the modelling of their arms and shoulders, and in the spare ones the higher breeding that is found in bones ; in the men the good looks of some—Lygon among them—and when not good-looking their cultured form and tone and manner, and the cut and fit of their dress-clothes (a garb which, despite the condemnation of the artist, is nevertheless the highest sartorial expression of cultured virility) ; all these products of a complex civilization combined to make for him a rare æsthetic feast.

The talk showed intimate touch with the shapers and shaping of history, with Kings and Courts, with statesmen and statesmanship, war and diplomacy, ambitions, rivalry, and love and life as these things are felt and lived by those in whose power alone it lies to live, as distinguished from the mere grind of bread-winning,

which has become in less privileged spheres the synonym and substitute for living.

Inspired and provoked by Mrs. Ferrers—for there was Irish blood in her, and she delighted to fling a glove of challenge on the glittering table, advancing some clever and audacious paradox, some extremist view or novel interpretation in order to evoke a flow of criticism and dispute, engendering tea-cup storms of eddying opinion and that temperamental fusion which comes of the glow of friction—this evening afforded Malet a rare feast of wit and badinage, of anecdote and laughter.

All had parted at the end of the London season, and after going their diverse ways, were now met together again under the same roof. Each had some novel and amusing or otherwise entertaining experience to relate of himself or of some other, and as is the way of well-selected house-parties, each—even the least significant—added a link to the chain of good fellowship. Even Malet, not a link of the same social carat, found himself one by sympathy and understanding.

And by power of his more lucid perceptions, amid the brilliant talk and laughter he was aware at intervals of specters at the board—the specter of his hostess's vain eating of her heart, of his host's tempestuous surgings at the shrine of his beloved; and dimly, but with ever-increasing conviction, he became conscious of a specter, sphinx-like as herself, overshadowing the brilliant beauty who was ravaging the lives and happiness of these.

Charm the world as she would and did and blind it by her spells, that X-ray power of his could see beyond, and he was convinced that, although the thief of others' happiness, she was not herself the depository of the precious stolen good.

He retired with heart and senses thrall to her. He had seen her play Bridge brilliantly, and win large sums gracefully, an achievement more difficult even than to lose large sums well. He had heard her sing in a voice

of bewitching sweetness and taste, a charming old song called "The Girl with the Delicate Air"; and he had seen her say her "Good-nights" with a face kaleidoscopic for the changes wherewith her features adjusted themselves to her varying degrees of warmth and friendship, kaleidoscopic also in the fact that each new readjustment was as charming as it had been unexpected.

Waking in the chill gray light of dawn, however, depressed by the late hour and the unwonted fatigues of the evening, and feeling gouty twinges through him as penalty for the two glasses of Pommery and one of Benedictine he had drunk, he found his heart palpitating still—but not for love; his senses like unstrung fiddle-strings.

He breakfasted in bed, and by aid of a cup of rarely flavored tea, laid his emotions of the previous evening on a shelf for future reference, recapturing his rôle of pen-driver.

The mood approved Mrs. Ferrers. She was a new and valuable specimen. He began to weave stories about her. Till suddenly it came to him that her own story, if one could but learn it, the heart and life-story a woman so lovely and provocative must have woven round herself—and doubtless some other—should be more interesting than any he could weave.

Without doubt, he had glimpsed for a moment a specter behind her chair—a faint gray shadow as of weariness or woe. It wanted but a word, a look, a hint, and the specter would take shape; her heart would be wriggling upon his pen. Was this he had envisaged a tragedy of soul or heart? Or was it one merely of circumstance? "There's allus summut," says a Lancashire proverb. He with more literary elegance styled it "a specter." Whatsoever it was, he was taken with a keen desire to penetrate its mysteries.

When he went down presently and found her still the center of a knot of worshippers, looking every whit

as beautiful by daylight as she had done *décolletée* and be-jewelled, the emotions he had laid upon a shelf be-stirred themselves again.

Again her personality dominated her psychology.

There was manifest this morning, even in this house whereof the wheels of the machinery would seem to have been velvet-tired, some whirr of bustle and excitement. The first meet of the Hunt was to be held on the Travenhoe lawns, Lygon for the first time taking up his Master-ship of Hounds.

The men had come down in their "pink," and conscious of looking their best, looked their best, the crude hard scarlet of their coats making such emphatic contrast with their white shirt-fronts and breeches as lent an added touch to their virility. For truly manly men are seldom æsthetic of taste.

An undercurrent satisfaction, appreciable as a nervous hum, had been roused by the anticipation of a rare day's sport. The southerly wind and cloudy sky were facts one could see for himself, while the rumor of "plenty of foxes" had been vouched for by Lygon.

Lygon, who was young to be Master of such a pack as the Quillom, had breakfasted early, and was not among his guests, having a hundred-and-one things to look to on this momentous morning of his installation.

Travenhoe was the center of a keen and famous hunting county; the Hunt was large and included many fine riders, and, moreover, a number of his lifelong intimates and comrades in the field. A large field was expected, the meet at Travenhoe prefacing the finest run in the county.

From the windows of the breakfast-room, Malet could see servants setting tables with liqueurs and "cup" and sandwiches for the regalement of guests.

In the meanwhile, with that complete relaxation of body and mind which men permit themselves immediately

before bracing their powers for action, the guests lounged leisurely after their luxurious breakfast, discussing the morning's news, the gossip of their correspondence, and—most of all—the day's prospects.

"My aunt!" exclaimed a wiry little man of parchment countenance with whom Malet had had some talk the previous evening in the smoke-room, talk which had informed him that the wiry one had broken every bone in his tough little body, out steeple-chasing. "You don't mean to say you're not comin' such a mornin' as it is, and such a run!" He eyed Malet's tweeds with looks of blank commiseration.

"I do mean it," Malet insisted smiling. "The only steed I ride is Pegasus."

"But, bless my soul!" the little man protested, sympathetically concerned; "even if you've left your favorite gee at home, Lygon can give you as decent a mount as you want."

He rubbed his little parchment hands together and sniffed the southerly wind, even while he spoke stamping his feet with impatience to be off.

Malet explained. Whereupon, with scarcely another word, he sheered away with airs as of one who, life being short and sport eternal, had no time to waste upon a "perisher" of merely temporal tastes.

Malet saw with amusement that he eyed him surreptitiously across the room, as though demanding of himself, "Who in blazes is this old crock Lygon is givin' us at the first meet of the season?"

Lady Lygon and the other women who had not breakfasted in their rooms, had breakfasted in their habits. Her beauty being preëminently womanly, she wore with grace perhaps the most trying of all clothes women are called upon to wear, the severe cut and fit and lack of embellishment making the vast majority of them look severe and plain.

The Duchess of Skye skulked about with lost, dis-

comfited airs: Malet conjectured because the form of the hunting-field had compelled her to drop out temporarily from the ranks of the emancipated, and since she had not learned to ride astride, to resume the frankly undivided skirt of serfdom.

Others too, it seemed, were of the same opinion; for he heard Foulger ask in an undertone of his little broken-boned Nimrod,

"I say, Chalmers, do you know why the Duchess reminds one of the French Revolution?"

"No. Does she? Why does she? She certainly looks a bit rattled this morning. But why the French Revolution?"

"Why, because she is one of the *sans culottes*! Ha! ha!"

Nimrod laughed because the Under-Secretary laughed, and he concluded that a joke had been made. Personally, being sun and wind and weather-dried, he had no more sap or sense of humor than a wisp of parchment upon which a will is written, and he thought men should be prohibited by Act of Parliament from making jokes on hunting mornings, wasting the breath of one so much in earnest as to break his bones for sheer amusement.

He sidled off as quickly from the Under-Secretary as he had done from Malet, having no more use for humorists than he had for persons who drove cattle so little mettlesome as pens. Glubb, cadaverous and long white-bearded, and vain with the vanity of long white-bearded men, was still preoccupied with his poor yellow butterfly. Having chased her round and round the room till he had succeeded in flinging down his cap upon and trapping her, he was now to be seen with airs of ingenuous triumph impaling her upon his long steel gaze and gloating over her.

He was not in hunting kit, and Malet had endured a moment of panic anticipating a morning in his society.

He had later been reassured however, for Glubb, inflated by the joys of conquest, gave him to understand that having temporarily escaped from the literary galley, he was not available for slaves of that ilk, nor indeed for any persons of his less appreciative sex.

Glubb would not, therefore, victimize him, and he looked forward to a morning of delicious rumination, sauntering through the beautiful houses and grounds, attended in spirit by the sorceress of his imagination.

Lygon came in just then, all energy and hurry, his tall figure showing to advantage in his handsome garb of "Master."

"Come, good people! Time! Time!" he called. He laughed excitedly. "The horses are round, and the stirrup-cup flowing!"

A little crowd of men fell back, obedient to his exhortation. Mrs. Ferrers was disclosed where she had been sitting in a magic circle.

"Phœbus!" he protested. "Why, you are not even in your habit, Mrs. Ferrers. Please be quick. We are getting off at once."

She did not move. She met his eyes quietly.

"Did you not know?" she asked, in her sweet silver voice. "I am so sorry. But I sprained my wrist in opening a window, and I cannot follow to-day."

She showed a slender hand wrapped round with a silk handkerchief.

First he was taken aback; so profoundly disappointed that his smiling face set rigidly. Then his stemmed blood, all surging passionately, swirled into a culvert of jealousy. He swept a hot gaze down the room for some man in mufti. For one in love reads love and issues of love in every happening.

The other men in their retreat turned one and all pink backs to reassure him, Malet and Glubb, who alone remained, being alone in tweeds. And Malet saw, with twinges possibly of mortification, that Lygon, bracket-



ing him with old Glubb, dismissed both from his jealous calculations.

Then his disappointment, which was deep, gave place to concern. His eyes bent passionately on the little bandaged wrist.

"Sprained your wrist? Upon my soul, I'm sorry. It's not serious, I hope. I hope it doesn't hurt you."

She shook her head, smiling.

"It is not much, but more than enough to prevent me from holding in Sultan. It feels stiff and awkward, and aches slightly."

"What a thousand pities! What *hard* luck! You would so much have enjoyed our run to-day. It won't be the same thing for any of us without you. But I will send off at once for a doctor."

He moved, all precipitancy, to a bell.

She put up a prohibitive hand.

"I have already sent for one."

He showed surprise.

"But who have you sent for? You know nothing of our doctors here."

She laughed lightly.

"My dear man," she said, "I am not wholly helpless. I wanted to get the tiresome thing set right as soon as possible. My maid inquired, and Dr. Corry is to come at half-past eleven."

"Dr. Corry? But who in the world is Corry? You must have Seldon. Seldon's our only decent surgeon."

She shook her red-brown head.

"It is nothing at all serious. Any one can treat a simple sprain. A doctor is not really necessary. But I am anxious to have a useful wrist again."

Lady Lygon, who had now come in, watched with a set lip her husband's undissembled and excessive disappointment.

"Dr. Corry is your tenant at 'Roseberry,' Morant. You know Dr. Corry," she said.

"Oh, that's Corry, of course! I remember now. But I shall send for Seldon. I know nothing of Corry, professionally. He may be no good at all."

"Oh, but," Lady Lygon insisted, glancing at Malet, "Dr. Corry is very clever, I am sure. I have met him, and he is nice and kind. He is Mr. Malet's nephew, you remember." She turned with a propitiatory smile to Malet.

Lygon laughed, more amused than abashed.

"Sorry," he said, with a disarming friendliness. "It's another of the things one should not have said. You'll forgive me, I'm sure, because I know nothing of Corry, as I say, professionally."

Malet forgave him. He knew nothing himself of Corry, professionally. And for the life of him, he would not have answered for the dilatory fellow.

"If you will feel neglected, Mrs. Ferrers——" Lady Lygon said.

"Oh, not for worlds!" her guest protested quickly. "I should feel like a wretch to keep you at home."

It seemed to Malet that both women were equally keen to be spared the ordeal of a morning together.

"Well, come and see us start," both host and hostess enjoined her, as they went out hurriedly in response to a shout for the "Master."

Lygon called back,

"I leave you in Mr. Malet's charge—and Professor Glubb's."

The injunction raised Malet to a seventh heaven. For now he would not only saunter through the grounds attended by his thoughts of her, but he would saunter in her actual good company.

They repaired to the lawns before the house.

Mrs. Ferrers complaining that her wrist ached while she was standing, they sat in a small arbor and watched the gay and charming scene. A number of persons had assembled, and were chatting and laughing together,

sitting their horses and partaking the refreshments which the busy servants carried round.

The handsome pack, under charge of the huntsman in his picturesque attire, could not suppress their keenness to be off, baying their muffled melancholy note which sounded the premature knell of their poor quarry. A picture of fine capability and condition they were, their black-and-white and tan tints a play of shifting color.

The firm-backed, well-set-up riders, on their sleek and powerful hunters, many of them splendid creatures, seemed to typify will-power dominating muscle-power. Both men and beasts were seething with suppressed excitement from the uncertainty concerning finds and chances, which makes the zest of sport.

There were motors and carriages in numbers, filled with those eager votaries of the chase who, debarred from following on horseback, are to be found in the train of every hunt, pursuing on wheels, and every whit as keen as hounds and hunters, and as voluble afterwards in their descriptions of the day's events.

From where they sat, the trio in the arbor saw the new Master presented with an address, heard him cheered with a ring so hearty as to set the horses curveting and the hounds baying again and threading feverish figures-of-eight in and out the pack.

At last the start was made, the hounds leading off with the huntsman, the horses prancing and demivolt-ing, restive for the open, the riders gesticulating, vociferating, and talking excitedly. And with the turning of backs, carriages and motors came into action, and so the hunt and its train drew off in high voice and spirits. The business of the day had begun.

In the course of minutes, the lawns were cleared, and there fell upon them that fine hush of Nature which follows after human bustle and excitement.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MAINLY ABOUT LOVE

**G**LUBB, depressed by the escape of his yellow butterfly, who had fluttered off upon a gentle roan, and harboring a little grudge against Mrs. Ferrers, who at dinner the previous evening had appeared more conversant with some moot point of archæology than a High Priest of the ilk considered fitting in a woman, betook himself shortly (attended by his flowing beard) to the library, a bundle of proofs for correction in his hands.

Malet thought his companion sighed relief to see him go, a sentiment he cordially shared.

The air being mild and perfumed and the gardens beautiful with late blooming flowers and autumn-crimsoned leaves, she expressed a desire to remain in the arbor. A servant was sent for a wrap, which her maid brought, a picturesque garment of gold-brown velvet trimmed with lace and Russian fox. Its rich soft coloring toned so admirably with the mellow tints about her as, with her red-brown hair, to give her the appearance of a presiding goddess of the season.

Malet's vanity and common sense waged a little battle before he found courage to confess himself old fogey to this delectable being. But some gouty twinges reinforcing the logic of his common sense, he yielded his vanity and went to the house for his sober old pepper-and-salt great-coat.

"I regret to spoil the picture," he apologized with

whimsical humility, as he reseated himself beside her. "I wonder if you beautiful folk are properly grateful to be spared the mortification of feeling yourselves a blot upon the landscape."

During his brief absence, her face had lost its smiles. Now it showed grave and a little weary.

"It is frightfully fatiguing," she replied, "to live always in the limelight. But come now, tell me about these charming heroines you write of. Are they real women you have met, or are they only creatures of your fancy?"

"Both."

"You mean that they are real women touched up by your imagination?"

"I mean that the attributes of all the women one meets in the flesh become assimilated by the mind, and are transformed by it into new creations."

She turned her beautiful eyes upon him.

"Have you ever met in the flesh your Ruby Charteris, a woman of such passionate intensity of feeling that she would really have sacrificed all for that man's sake, and would have been as splendidly happy as you describe her—just for love of him?"

He smiled.

"You must allow something to artistic license—a little over-drawing, accentuation of high lights, and so forth. But in point of fact, the character was drawn from life."

"I suppose she was one of the women one does not talk about."

"On the contrary, she was a highly respected wife, and the mother of four fine boys."

"And was it her husband she loved with that romantic fervor?"

"Now you have me. The story I wrote round her was not her story. But it was the story she deserved, and the one suited to her intense and vivid nature. Her real story was to be the wife of a drab-natured, narrow-spirited, retired army captain, living on a small income

in a small suburban town. That, and to be his domestic drudge and the mother of his four boys."

"You were in love with her yourself," she said quickly.

"I was. She was thirty, I eighteen, a struggling young journalist, as threadbare as I was sentimental. I shared their home with them, and paid twenty-five shillings a week for the privilege of living beneath the same roof with her, and of living on cakes and rice-puddings made by her adorable hands. I found it an inestimable privilege."

"It was from her you got your high ideals of womanhood."

"She laid the foundations no doubt, but the house has had some stories added since."

"And did she love you in return?"

He scoffed.

"Heavens, no! She was far too much woman to love a raw boy. She was the Alma Mater of my soul. It fed upon her gentle face, was sunned by her high smiles, and watered by her sorrows. And so it grew and grew, until it cracked my brain and made a writer of me."

Again she turned her beautiful eyes upon him. She said, with humor in her silver voice:

"I fear you are a very sentimental person, Mr. Malet."

"Thanks be!" he answered gravely. "Since we get from life only what we bring to it."

There was a pause. Then she asked,

"And did she love anybody? And did she really elope from her wretch of a husband?"

"He was not a wretch, but only deplorably limited. Not a bad man according to his lights, but a harrow for her great heart. He was a martinet, and Discipline was his religion. Such poor little rings and brooches as she had, he kept under lock and key, and he put out on Sunday mornings or other gala occasions those he wished her to wear, and locked them away in the evening. She had no means of her own, and he would keep her waiting

sometimes a whole week for a penny stamp to send a letter. He wished to impress her with the due sense of a man and a husband's authority."

"You gave her stamps, I am convinced," she said again quickly. "I can hear it in your voice."

"When I could afford it, I enjoyed that privilege. She was, as I tell you, great of soul; and because she knew how much a privilege I felt it, sometimes she allowed it to me. Perhaps, too, sometimes, poor soul, her need was great to send her letters."

"How horribly sad! How wickedly unjust that such a woman should have been tyrannized over by such a wretch! But was she so noble and interesting a character as you have made your Ruby Charteris?"

He sighed.

"She was living flesh and blood. And a pen-and-paper woman is, after all—only a pen-and-paper woman."

"Beautiful?"

"Beautiful."

"Shabbily dressed?" There was compassion in her voice.

"You would have called her shockingly dressed—she had three boys to buy sailor suits and toys for. *I* did not notice her clothes."

"But—for the third time—did she run away like Ruby to be happy with the other man? Was there another man?"

"There was another man—her other self. But she did not, like Ruby, run away to be happy with him. She was not an up-to-date person, and she believed that the world was created out of dust four thousand years ago; that God had cursed her sex because a woman ate an apple in a garden; that at the end of three score years and ten of life and two score years and ten of suffering, she would, by God's mercy, perhaps go to heaven, and meet her man there.

"So she stuck to her tyrant, and patiently waited a

week for a stamp and wore the rings and brooches he doled out to her on Sunday mornings, and went to church with him, and suffered everything because she believed it was ordained for her to do her part in expiating that other woman's sin of eating a forbidden apple."

"What has become of her?"

"Become of her?" His voice was grave. "After all, her God was good to her. At thirty-one, on the birth of her fourth boy—now a young and rising scientist—she died, as meekly and as beautifully as she had lived."

"What a horrible, horrible tragedy!"

"But a lovely life!"

"And all that happiness and fervor you described in her story—in Ruby Charteris' story—with the other man, was merely fiction, then."

"No. I saw it in her eyes when she looked at him."

"Did her husband see it?"

He laughed grimly.

"Heavens! Does a bat see the glory of the stars?"

"You really are most sentimental, Mr. Malet."

"It is my calling, please remember."

There was a pause, during which her gaze roved restlessly from flower to flower of the beds before her, somewhat as a bee might have done.

Then she questioned with great earnestness:

"Is it your experience that every woman is capable of a great passion, if she only meets the right man?" There was a certain tension in her silver voice.

"Oh no. A teacup will not hold a gobletful. But every normal person is capable of being in love; capable of being drawn to some other by a force of attraction greater than his or her other powers."

"You say 'every normal person.' What do you mean by normal?"

"One whose qualities are proportionately distributed—so much power invested in this department, so much in that, and so much in others."



"But that would make us all alike."

"By no means. I did not say equally, but proportionately distributed. The limits must have a wide range, of course. But outside that range abnormality begins. It is so with faces. No two persons are alike in feature. Yet we see at a glance when a nose is abnormally large, eyes abnormally small, or a forehead abnormally top-heavy. And we expect—and find—corresponding mental or temperamental defects."

"But what is it in us that makes us capable of a grand passion? It is an attribute of the soul surely, and being this it cannot be a question of the balance of personal qualities."

"Now you are taking me out of my depth," he protested, smiling. "For who can say where body ends and soul begins—the two are so subtly and mysteriously blended. And yet it seems to me, that though passion is a fire of the soul, in order that it may kindle the body, the body must possess suitable fuel. And this fuel is a vital fiber which is found in normal healthy bodies, but is lacking in some abnormal ones."

"But cannot everybody fall in love?"

"As I say, every healthy normal person can, the abnormal not necessarily, because their bodies may lack that fuel which normally feeds the soul-enkindled flame of passion. Persons born of loveless marriages are but seldom capable of love. The sensualist can no more passionately love than can a lump of clay take fire. Sensuality is, of course, considered as much a disease of the emotional system as dyspepsia is of the digestive system."

"A too prevalent disease," she said, curling a fastidious lip.

She remained in thought.

Then she said, speaking with careful slowness:

"How can we distinguish between inherent lack of inflammability and inflammability which has not taken

fire merely because it has not met its counterpart—its twin-soul, as you writers of romance call it?"

"It is not easy, of course. Because, naturally, the higher the power of inflammability—the greater the capacity to burn fiercely—the more likely one is to go long and far before meeting that true mate who can kindle the flame to its fullest intensity."

"Surely you are wrong now; for surely the poets are able to love passionately. Some of them, Keats and Byron and Burns, seem never to have been out of love."

He laughed.

"It was not love. Only the imagination was involved—or only the senses. Not the heart."

"Again, how is one to distinguish?"

"That is not so difficult. When only the senses are involved, the sentiment is unduly crude and selfish; when only the imagination is involved, the sentiment is unduly visionary and selfless. True love—the love of the heart—has its roots in the flesh, its branches in the soul. It grips every power and faculty. One does not feel that the beloved is an angel nor that she is an houri. One feels that she is his own flesh, and the feeling transfigures his own flesh. It is at the same time a miracle and the simplest, most inevitable thing in the world."

After another pause, she asked in a changed voice, now half mocking, half serious:

"And since you are so expert in romantic passion, tell me whether you think it possible that a woman who admires and has an affection for a man, but feels none of the high-flown raptures you describe might come to feel them if she were to marry him. Is it possible for marriage to kindle them?"

"Emphatically, no. It is a time-dishonored delusion. Esteem and affection may come of marriage, but though love includes affection and esteem, esteem and affection are no more love than the glow of a lamp on a drawing-room table is—starlight."

A servant approaching them across the lawn cut short their confidences.

"Dr. Corry, to see you in the ante-room, ma'am," he announced with more ceremony than, Malet reflected amused, Peter had ever before had accorded to him. For Peter was not in the habit of visiting fashionable beauties.

She seemed to collect her thoughts. Then, turning:

"Thank you. I will come at once," she said.

She set a slender, nervous hand, glittering with jewels, upon Malet's arm. She looked into his eyes, and said with an engaging winsomeness, not without a sparkle of coquetry:

"We have had a most delightful talk. I love to hear experts on their own subjects. You must talk with me again."

She gathered her velvet wrap about her, and moved with swift grace to the house.

Malet was left with an impression that her interest in his subject had been more personal than merely intellectual. He wondered whether she herself were contemplating marriage, and attracted by his rank and wealth to some man she did not love, was expecting or hoping that love might follow. Was this why she kept Lygon at bay? Or was Lygon the man? If so, was ambition pointing her to the Divorce Court—the only way by which she could become his wife—while love was a mere secondary asset which she looked to secure likewise?

The suspicion cast a sidelight on her character. It gave him check. He curbed the exotic fancies he had been cherishing about her. For, that she should be cold-hearted and calculating beneath her charms, robbed these of magic for him.

One might pardon a woman for being willing to suffer the mire of the Divorce Court for the sake of love; but to embark in that skunk galley with an eye merely to worldly possessions, was a different story.

His previous experience of brilliant women had shown him that their nature was to burn their lights upon the surface, all within being cold and empty. Was this true of her likewise? Was she not, after all, unique? A cold-hearted woman was, to his mind, an abomination, a human freak, seeing that woman was, in his view, adorable mainly by virtue of her warm emotions.

In Mrs. Ferrers he found, however, none of the stigmata of unwomanliness. She was neither mannish nor "little-girl"-ish. She was not athletic, nor did she drink or smoke or swear, or copy other of the vices of a less fastidious, because a less delicately organized sex. In all her tastes and methods she was exquisitely dainty, revealing that talent of subtle and delicate selectiveness which is the highest gift and the distinguishing trait of woman. She seemed to him, indeed, a wellnigh perfect specimen of that which was, in his eyes, the more complex and inestimable sex.

He did not see her again until they met at luncheon, she and he and Glubb, when the talk was all of the Pageant about which Lady Lygon had told him, and to rehearse which the party had met. Mrs. Ferrers had written the book of words, a bright and clever little drama, portraying the incident of King Henry and Fair Rosamund. This he had read, and he now complimented her upon its literary ability, while Glubb paid tribute to its historical accuracy and the local atmosphere with which she had skilfully invested it.

"I must have two songs," she said—"a drinking-song for the soldiers in the first episode, and a dancing song for the girls in the last. But I am hopeless at verse. Do, Mr. Malet, compose them for me."

He promised to do his best, but protested that verse was not his line either. He spent the afternoon in writing two sufficiently creditable lyrics, although he would

vastly have preferred to have spent it in driving with beauty.

The hunting party returned in spirits after an eventful day.

As hungry as proverbial hunters, after changes into tweeds and tea-gowns, they assembled to discuss the day's doings and a substantial meal.

Lygon, who, Malet perceived from his face, had not enjoyed himself at all and was as sulky and taciturn as a good host may permit himself to be, came in all burning eyes and eagerness for his inamorata. She met the eyes with calm defensive ones, as though sustaining some stand she had taken up against him.

Malet suspected an impending crisis. He interpreted it as the crisis which sooner or later crops up in the relations between a man in love and the woman he loves, but he is not free to marry.

Later, he overheard him say to her in tense undertones:

"I must talk with you. Come to the Orangery in half an hour."

He knew that Malet must hear him. But in his mood of stress, he disregarded this.

She looked at him with quiet eyes, and shook her head.

He made a gesture as of one tormented beyond endurance.

He had no alternative but to endure, however, for presently the other women of the party retiring to rest before dinner, she likewise withdrew. He repaired to the smoking-room, where he sat temperamentally frowning and biting his nails above his *Times*, which had arrived after the morning departure.

Dinner on this evening was not the feast of wit and spirits it had been the previous evening. Hard riding, save to the preternaturally vigorous, leaves no surplus of nervous force for mental and sympathetic exchanges.

The exposure to wind and strong light had flushed and coarsened the women's faces to a degree which cosmetics could not conceal, so detracting from one æsthetic pleasure of the table.

Mrs. Ferrers, her skin cool and white and smooth as satin, her eyes clear and brilliant, and her brain unspent, shone with greater luster than before.

Monica, although one of those fortunate women whose complexions become vivid, the reds and whites intensified as though painted, as a result of a day in the air, was silent and ineffective.

After dinner most of the party congregated to discuss the Pageant. The cast had not yet been made. A well-known actor-manager of a London theater, who had consented to be Master of the Pageant, was coming the following morning to suit the company to their respective parts.

Significant glances cast at Mrs. Ferrers and significant mutenesses when the rôle of Rosamund was mentioned, showed it to be a foregone conclusion in the minds of all that the apple of choice would fall to her.

Amid all these distractions Lygon got no chance of a word with her.

## CHAPTER XV.

### ELEANOR AND ROSAMUND

**M**RS. FERRERS, in a dress of white cloth with gold embroideries, took her stand the following morning on a platform temporarily erected in the billiard-room, and with a good deal of dramatic talent, read her little play to the assembled house-party, augmented by some guests invited from the neighborhood.

The actor-manager, a handsome dark man with curly hair, blue eyes "put in with smutty fingers," and a blue-black chin, listened in the pose of Hamlet watching the play before the King and Queen. From time to time, with slight but significant raisings of his dark brows, he jotted a memo. on his shirt-cuff.

Once or twice he softly clapped his hands or called a bravo! in the rich deep voice of Romeo.

When she had finished to a round of applause, he went up to her and shook her by the hand.

"Dear lady," he said, with glances of effusive admiration, "what a loss to the profession that you were not born an orange girl! What an actress you would have made! This thing is going to go."

"I hope so," she returned, laughing at his theatrical impressiveness. "But I assure you I am no undiscovered Nell Gwynn."

"Some day I hope you'll write a play for me," he said. "We'd make a pot of money out of it. It would be great."

He was swept aside by other admirers, who surged upon the little platform to congratulate her.

"Simply splendid!" "Topping!" "Clinking!" "Quite dramatic!" "Such acting!" buzzed about her. And inspired by her, all who were to take part were fired to emulate her.

The actor-manager, a famous beau, one who drew women to his *matinée* impersonations as flies to honey-pots, and received by every post, as tribute to his art and looks, love-notes from unappreciated wives and from girls cutting their love-teeth, returned to his chair on the platform.

"And now," he said, scrip and pencil in hand, "now to select the cast!"

A Mistress of the Robes was there with two pretty daughters of Lygon's bailiff, and these she dressed in quaint old-fashioned head-dresses and farthingales, and other old-world charming gear from which our modern dress is certainly a lamentable decadence. The transformation effected in the girls by the exchange of cotton shirts, hobble skirts, and Pierrot hats, for the graceful and poetic garments of a more æsthetic age, argued too a decadence, despite our vaunted progress, in our ideals of woman and womanhood.

On the other hand, some elaborate outfits of an earlier century, in which a trio of good-looking youths of the party paraded with slightly shamefaced if complacent glances, showed that masculine dress has been making all the while for manlier ideals, doffing the effeminate and ornate and realizing ever more and more of that restraint and simplicity which are beyond everything virile.

The actor-manager had now put off his social manner (an incongruous blend of London stockbroker with Hamlet, Prince of Denmark) and had put on the artist. And his artist-eye, ranging the rows of faces before him, criticizing and appraising, was the eye of genius. From



time to time his gaze halted and lingered. He consulted the scrip in his hand, and after a pause for reflection, rapidly jotted another memo. on his shirt-cuff.

When the last dress had been acclaimed, that in which in the final episode Fair Rosamund was to take and to drink the cup of poison forced upon her by her jealous rival, Eleanor—a lovely gown of white satin with a collar of falling lace—he rose and stepped to the front of the platform.

“And now, ladies and gentlemen,” he said, in the terse, practical tones which made him a power at rehearsals, “having seen the dresses for the various parts, we must decide upon the ladies and gentlemen who are to wear them. As I am still hesitating between the two ladies I shall ask to take the principal female rôles, I propose to fill the minor and the masculine parts first. And first I want a gentleman for the Queen’s lover. Will the fifth gentleman from the right in the third row kindly stand up for a moment?”

Foulger, the handsome Under-Secretary, rose and remained standing for a minute with a bashful demeanor half cloaked with effrontery, which somehow suggested not a lion in a sheep skin but a sheep in a lion skin. As he re-seated himself, the actor-manager observed complacently,

“Quite so! Thank-you. Just the right height for a lover, sir.”

Whereupon, “Good old Foulger!” “Go it, Foulger!” and other kindred exhortations arose amid good-humored laughter.

“With the cap and the curls——” the actor-manager continued reflectively, and came to a halt. For Foulger’s hair, as a result of the labors of office, so he said, but his friends said as a result of too good living, was rapidly thinning over the temples.

All men being tolerant to the victims of those ills of

the flesh to which all are heirs, the laughter suddenly and sympathetically ceased.

It began again, supplemented by cheering, as Foulger, having withdrawn, reëntered dressed in a Robin-Hood dress of green which greatly became him.

"For King Henry himself, I shall ask Lord Lygon kindly to oblige," the actor-manager observed.

"Certainly," Lygon assented, and presently, looking very handsome and important, paraded somewhat restively in a kingly robe of purple velvet and a jewelled crown.

"For the King's Chamberlain, may we have, if you please, the gentleman in the middle of the fourth row—the gentleman with the white beard?"

But Glubb protested, with some asperity, that he was not taking part. He looked offended. Any fool might have known, he reflected, that an archæologist of his standing was not eligible for such mummery.

"Ah, a pity, sir," the actor-manager remarked facetiously. "There's nothing like the real article, home-grown—especially in a wind, when false ones are liable to blow off."

Whereupon sundry persons tittered, and the little yellow-haired lady beside the Professor laughed outright. It was the first intimation he had had that, for all the big blue eyes she made at him, she was not taking him so seriously as he considered due. He looked still more offended. He secretly called the actor-manager an impudent, underbred fellow.

In the course of an hour the cast had been chosen, and its members applauded in their handsome robes, save and except for two of its number, Queen Eleanor the jealous wife, and Rosamund, her lovely rival. And the two women so far not cast for parts were Lady Lygon and Mrs. Ferrers.

Those who realized how affairs stood—the actor-man-

ager was not of these—saw a certain fitness, but at the same time an undesigned cruelty in it, that these two should stand to one another in the play in the same relation as they stood in real life. There was a good deal of surprise that the actor-manager had hesitated for a moment over their respective rôles. Nobody had entertained a doubt but that Mrs. Ferrers would be chosen for Fair Rosamund, her beauty and her whiteness being so remarkable.

There was a tense silence, expressing a breathless expectancy, when the Master of the Pageant observed with importance and with a certain complacency, as though secretly congratulating himself upon what he regarded as a clever solution of a knotty problem :

"And now we come to the two principal female rôles, the beautiful but jealous Queen Eleanor and her fair rival." He bowed and smiled upon the two remaining candidates. "We are fortunate to possess two ladies so preëminently qualified to fill these. Will Lady Lygon be good enough to take the part"—he paused impressively, as doubtless Paris did, enjoying a dramatic moment before awarding the apple—"the part of Fair Rosamund, and Mrs. Ferrers the part of Queen Eleanor?"

The tenseness of expectancy lapsed into flat disappointment. All felt as with one mind that the actor, whose previous selections had been unanimously approved, had now made a conspicuous blunder. For surely the principal rôle, that most important and with the strongest appeal to interest and sympathy, was that of the beautiful creature who, having superseded the Queen in the King's affections, fell a victim to her tyrannous jealousy. And surely all stage tradition and stage craft demanded that to the most beautiful and striking-looking woman of the company should be allotted the chief part.

So strong was the feeling of dissent, indeed, that despite the courtesies due to a hostess, even a faint

murmur of dissatisfaction arose. It was stifled at once however, a loud clapping of hands replacing it. Somebody raised a faint cheer.

Neither Lady Lygon nor her guest, both being accustomed to controlling their expression, betrayed any sign, save that Lady Lygon slightly flushed, while Mrs. Ferrers' markedly dazzling pallor became a shade more dazzling.

The hand-clapping died hollowly away. Being a primitive form of expression it lacks the subtlety belonging to speech, the guile to conceal thought. When forced and insincere it is too loud and blatant, or it is too faint and dies of inanition. This died of inanition. For interest and zest having been worked up to concert-pitch, all were now strongly impressed by a sense of culmination on a false note.

The Duchess of Skye permitted herself a protest.

The beautiful old dresses, artistic and womanly, had somewhat put her out of conceit with her trousers, this morning of blue serge, adorned with a superfluity of scarlet buttons that did not button anything. She felt she must assert herself or go utterly to the wall. She herself had been allotted the part of Britannia, without whom, of course, no patriotic Pageant would have been complete. She had decided to wear a Union Jack, so disposed about her as to leave no doubt but that it was her only garment.

She said crisply:

"Oh, but Mr. Master-of-the-Pageant, we all thought Lady Lygon would, of course, be the Queen, especially as Lord Lygon is the King."

"Madam," the actor-manager said impressively, and with a shade of hauteur that one should question his decision, "the stage ignores such matrimonial distinctions."

"Yes, I know it does where mere morality is concerned," she retorted impudently. "But here in their

own county, I'm sure every one would like Lord and Lady Lygon to observe them."

Now the actor-manager showed ruffled. He forced a smile—a smile of conscious power, however.

"One moment, if you please," he said. He turned from her and addressed the two ladies.

"Will her ladyship and Mrs. Ferrers be good enough to put on the costumes for the parts I have selected for them?"

He waved a hand toward the Mistress of the Robes. She vanished with her charges.

Again there were silence and tension. All eyes turned to the door of the temporary dressing-room whence the rivals in love and in drama would reappear. A little talk buzzed up, then buzzed away again.

And when presently the Mistress of the Robes came forth, with airs of triumph and a "Right-you-were!" glance at her chief behind her, her two charges in their robes, there fell silence again.

Malet saw in a moment, with his keen artistic sense, that the actor had been right, that the subtler and more effective note had been struck in his rejection of the more obvious and commonplace presentment for one more subtle and uncommon. Not the arrestingly beautiful and dazzling woman had robbed the gentler and lovelier of her husband's affections, but the gentler and lovelier had stolen into his heart, superseding her splendid rival.

Mrs. Ferrers, moreover, with her glance of power and brilliant self-centeredness, would vastly better lend herself to the last episode, in which by dominance of will and character, she compelled her ill-starred rival to drink the fatal cup.

Monica, still faintly flushed and with a little fire of excitement in her dark eyes, made, in her white robe and a wreath of lilies in her hair, a perfect and pathetic Rosamund. In her excitement and interest the marble

apathy of her face had melted into warmth and animation. She looked lovely and appealing.

Mrs. Ferrers, in her crown and robe of crimson velvet, mantled with ermine, was superb. And yet, seeing the two stand together, one saw in her essentially the Queen-Consort, the brilliant imperious partner of her husband's state and counsels, but not the woman of his heart. Seeing them together, one saw in a flash how the less brilliant and more tender and emotional woman might well have appealed to the human and passionate in him, while his superb consort had left him cold.

Just now, Mrs. Ferrers' mobile features were a trifle set, her eyes agate. She smiled, however, as though well pleased, betraying no symptom of the disappointment she was feeling. Yet added to this, she experienced a sense, rare with her indeed, of having been bidden take second place.

In working out her little drama she had made Fair Rosamund's by far the more prominent and interesting part. The Queen's was not only of less consequence, it was even unpleasing. She had taken it for granted that the rôle of Rosamund would fall to her, and having herself been the Fair Rosamund in many living dramas, she had skilfully invested the character with a romantic glow and sympathetic appeal, which made the character of the mere wife, jealous and neglected, a harsh and disagreeable one.

Her Rosamund was no frail and flaxen weakling, fond and tame recipient of a monarch's favors, she was a strong and interesting woman, proud and delicate and fastidiously weary of the world-wide worship she excited by her alabaster beauty, repulsing throughout her importunate kingly adorer, and dying finally a victim to the Queen's jealousy, though stainless of wrong, and of impeccable innocence.

She had chosen this episode with a view to rendering it a picturesque apotheosis of her own case, a public

vindication of the fatal charm she wielded. For this and the domestic havoc it engendered were facts in high life which had become common topic, not only in England but over all the civilized globe.

One might have found pictures of the beautiful Mrs. Ferrers in the wildest West, in South African kraals, and in the tents of Congo rubber-hunters. There was not a little Cockney newsboy who did not know that Prince James of Lancaster had taken poison for her sake, nor a suburban schoolgirl who, having read of her clothes and her successes, did not sometimes wistfully study her face in the glass for budding signs of a similar fatal gift.

And in this part of Fair Rosamund her clever brain had devised a dramatic and effective means of tempering a certain lurid glare which had come to beat about her—whether justified or not remains to be shown. She had adroitly worked up the part to show the “fatal woman” as one who might be vastly more sinned against than sinning.

There were many women of her set, cheap and notorious for their intrigues. In addition to being pre-eminent in brain and beauty, she desired to be unique as well in being virtuous. It was her ambition, when the history of the times should come to be written, to be known as the famous Hetaira of the Twentieth Century, who had subjugated all men but had succumbed to none.

And as it was forbidden to a woman to proclaim her immaculacy from the house-tops, seeing that to assert it would be to admit a doubt concerning that which should be above suspicion, her ready wit had caught at this impersonation as a charming and effective plea in extenuation of her own too potent witchery.

And now the actor-manager, whose only thought had been to make a fine dramatic coup, had in the space of minutes frustrated all her reckoning and plans.

It cannot be wondered at, accordingly, if, standing in Eleanor's crown and robes beside Fair Rosamund, the effort she was making to stifle every evidence of her chagrin, should have brought out the pride and the power of her face rather than its more lovable and charming attributes. With her suggestion of restrained power, her tall reed-like figure amplified by the rich velvet of her robe and the jeweled crown upon her red-brown hair, she made, however, a magnificent Queen Eleanor.

The room rang suddenly with acclamation. After all, the actor had been right. People wondered now that they could have thought otherwise.

Only the Duchess of Skye gave a dying kick.

"But, Mr. Master," she protested, "Fair Rosamund must surely have been fair. And Lady Lygon is dark, while Mrs. Ferrers is—fair."

If ever silence spoke, her pause before the word said "Carrots." 'For the Duke was one of Mrs. Ferrers' victims.)

"Either lady," the actor-manager observed pleasantly, his ruffled feelings being now placated by the general approval, "either lady would require to wear a flaxen transformation. For neither is flaxen enough for a public which demands for its gate-money that black shall be black and white white."

As the two stood side by side upon the platform, Malet saw Lygon glance once, and then stare at his wife with something like surprise, almost as he might have done at the face of a stranger. His eyes soon returned to the other, however.

"But I cannot act," Lady Lygon objected, when she appeared presently in her own character and dress. "I have not the least dramatic talent."

The Master reassured her.

"You have not much to say, and in pageants character and plots are revealed chiefly by action. You can



easily be coached to play your part. Now, ladies and gentlemen, may we have a first rehearsal on Wednesday? That will give you time to learn your parts."

Mrs. Ferrers was too much woman-of-the-world to betray any sign of having expected and wished for a different disposition of things.

"The rôle of jealous wife will be quite novel to you," Foulger told her with boyish impertinence.

"It is one of the compensations of widowhood to be relieved from so odious a one," she said.

"You would be safe, in any case."

She did not answer. She merely turned upon him that which had been styled her "sphinx-look," a long, slow, baffling gaze, half veiled by her black lashes, expressing nothing, expressing inscrutable things—according to the mind of the observer. She had found it even more effective than speech, even when she had something effective to say. And just then she had nothing effective to say to Foulger, her mind being otherwise employed.

"I did my best for you, my dear," the Duchess told her, with a dramatic commiseration which made her seem the victim of an insufferable affront. "Because of course I and everybody had expected you to be the Rosamund woman. You should get Lygon to punch this actor-person's head for him. He takes too much upon himself. He's simply spoilt. I believe, by the way, I once wrote him a love-letter myself. I was only a schoolgirl, of course."

Mrs. Ferrers never snapped—even when snapped at. This forbearance on her part so resulted that in the place of two dogs barking and biting, there was one dignified human creature—with a cur snapping at her heels. So now she did not retort upon her Grace of Skye.

"But really, Duchess," she returned, with suave surprise, "I am quite congratulating myself upon my elevation to the throne."

"Surely you would have preferred to be the leading lady? And surely Rosamund's is *the* important part?"

Mrs. Ferrers laughed again, and shook her red-brown head.

"Surely, you dear thing," she cried, "there can be no part more important than a Queen's. Just think!" she added gaily. "I shall wear a crown, and reign for three whole hours."

The Duchess stalked off, worsted. In all her encounters with the beauty—and, as I have said, the Duke was one of Mrs. Ferrers' victims—she failed to draw blood. She had to content herself, accordingly, with tearing the frills of her rival's reputation.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE LOVERS

**F**OR three days Lygon had been straining every power to effect an interview with Mrs. Ferrers. But though a host has in his own house some considerable sway in the disposition of his guests, he can be checkmated by a clever woman.

He ran her to earth at last, however, in the Orangery, whither, believing him to have gone out riding, she had taken refuge one day from some others of the house-party. For, as she had told Malet, the rôle of popular beauty, forever smiling and responsive, is fatiguing to sustain.

In the world of society, where all things have their price, popularity must, like other things, be paid for. The popular man or woman is just as much the servant of the people as the popular actor or actress is. In return for its marks of approval, the bear must be always willing to dance, and in trim to dance amusingly.

Accordingly, the beauty, feeling that her eyes required a respite from perpetual glancing while the muscles of her smiles had gone tired, escaped under cover of a momentary lull in masculine interest, to seek refuge in the Orangery.

Finding herself at last alone, she sank with a sigh of deep relief into a capacious easy chair, dropped her arms to her sides, and relaxed all the muscles of her body as she had learned from some expert in nervous diseases to do. She unbent her features from their customary tension, and let her lids drop upon her tired eyes.

She knew well enough that she would not be allowed to enjoy her interregnum long. Some masculine creature—woman's predatory foe!—would shortly steal a march upon her, and demand that she should entertain or should be entertained by him. And this morning she was in no humor to do one or the other.

This morning, the sense that she was paying too high a price for her whistle was strong upon her. Those five years in which she had been the woman most admired and besieged in London society, had shown her that admiration was a cup which, when it had lost the intoxication of novelty, soon cloyed. Like other cups it might become an obsessing need, despite the fact that after the sparkle had gone, it was but small flat ale. Sufficient perhaps for the vain and shallow woman! But Mrs. Ferrers was at the same time too beautiful to be vain and too clever to be shallow.

After some minutes she opened her eyes upon the charm and quiet of her refuge. It was an exact replica on a smaller scale of the Orangery at Kensington Palace, elegant in its dignified and chaste simplicity, its harmonious poise and repose calming and uplifting the sense. It showed like a temple to the worship of one of Nature's most beautiful creations, the orange tree, with its dark glistening foliage, its splendid golden fruit, and waxlike fragrant blossoms. The windows of the shrine were draped with long straight curtains of rich orange-colored silk, and the furniture was similarly upholstered. The repetition of the golden note was truly artistic.

Her eyes flitted with languorous pleasure about her. She had been wise to flee her world before dropping her mask of animation. For divested of this, and of that fusillade of arrowy glances which the bowmen of her brain were perpetually sharply shooting from the windows of her eyes, in that temperamental resistance by means of which each one of us perpetually defends

his citadel of character against his neighbors, she showed bored and weary.

And though society pardons the breaking of every ordinance of the decalogue—save that perhaps of murder—to be bored or wearied by it is indeed a sin unpardonable.

As she had foreseen, she was not long permitted to enjoy her respite. At the sound of a footstep, she sighed and sat up, recurled the corners of her mouth, reset her eye-strings to the notches of winged darts.

The footsteps were Lygon's. He strode into the middle of the room as though dropped out of a thunder-cloud, with Olympian fume and fuss still wreathing round him.

"At last!" he said in a hot voice, his gaze transfixing her. "Why have you avoided me?"

She shrugged a delicate shoulder.

"It offends my taste that you should make love to me here—with *her* here."

"Mine still more," he retorted dryly. "You need not have been afraid."

She made a little deprecatory mouth. Her eyes melted.

"I should have known," she said. "You are different in everything from all the others, Morant."

He was beyond the stage, however, to be appeased by pretty eyes and words.

"We must come to an understanding," he said, with a stern mouth. "For three whole years you have made my life a torment. I am at the end of my patience. I am no longer to be cheated with promises."

"What is it you want now?" she questioned wearily. "Why can we not go on as we are doing? We see as much of one another as is good for us. The cat-and-dog lives most husbands and wives lead show us that love will not stand the strain of daily life together."

"I believe nothing of the sort!" he broke out strenu-

ously. "Where two persons really care for one another, life together only further strengthens their affection."

"Did you find it so in your case? I did not in mine."

"I have told you I never loved Monica. I married her because I had to marry some one. At the end of a year we ceased to be anything to one another. She is one of the many women quite incapable of love, and therefore incapable of keeping a man's love for her. For her, the be-all and end-all of life is motherhood."

"You are quite sure of that?" she submitted, with a slightly mocking lip.

"Perfectly! It isn't a thing a man can be mistaken about. So you need have no fear lest you should separate a devoted couple. Why are you smiling?"

She controlled her lips.

"I always find it amusing to hear men sum up women, and dismiss them in a few words. Believe me, my friend, we are too complex to be so dismissed."

"All women are not like you," he said, with an impatient gesture that discarded the others. "But I don't want to nor do I mean to talk abstract principles. I want to learn definitely and once for all what you are going to do."

She smiled again—a different sort of smile, an affectionate, teasing, adorable smile.

"You seem to be in a 'your-money-or-your-life' mood. You set a pistol to my head and say, 'This is your last chance. Take me, or forever lose me!'"

He did not return her smile. His mouth was grim, his two eyes covered her as she suggested, like the steel muzzles of revolvers.

"You have said it," he rejoined quietly. "You are all that I want in the world. For these three years, I have craved and waited for you—and you have put me off with promises. But—I have come to the end of my patience."

He stood before her like a man of iron, his figure beginning, with his thirty-five years, to lose its suppleness of youth, and to be broadening and settling.

While he spoke, she studied him with clever eyes, as though seeking weak points in his armor.

"And if I have nothing to give still but promises?" she submitted quietly.

"Then I will have done with you," he answered quickly. "For much as I want you and have wanted you all these years, I have discovered a new quality in myself—I can do without you."

Two bright spots of color burned up suddenly now in her cheeks, two sparks kindled in her eyes. She ceased to smile.

"You mean that you are growing tired of me?"

"Not at all. Quite the contrary! But I suspect that the power of doing without is the stone basis on which all strong desires stand. When men blow out their brains because life isn't good enough—lacking one thing—they do so from weakness, not from strength."

"You are growing clever, Morant."

"Possibly! To be in love with a woman like you is a liberal education."

She shook her head sadly.

"When philosophy comes in at the door, love flies out by the window."

He sighed harshly.

"Not always. Love that will stand the test of philosophizing about it, is too real and solid to fly."

There was a long pause, during which, looking unflinching into one another's eyes, they seemed to measure swords.

Then she stretched out a hand with a charming gesture.

"I am very fond of you," she said. "In these three years while you have been growing able to do without me, I have been growing unable to do without you."

She sighed. Then she added in a low voice: "What is it you want me to do?"

"You know quite well. Have I not said the thing over and over again? And it sounds so brutish in bald words. I want you to come away with me—openly before the world. When Monica releases me, we can be married. And I swear before God, Vanna, that it will not be my fault if I cannot make up to you for all the horrible business you will have to go through first."

There was a faint rustle of silk to show the shudder that ran through her.

"It is a horrible, odious business, I know, for a woman like you," he went on. "But if a man can, I swear I will make up to you for it."

"But supposing your wife should not—release you?"

"That risk I must ask you to take—with the rest of it. Other women have done it for men they cared for. If you loved me as I love you, you'd feel it was worth the shot."

"To be humbled in the dust," she said. "For people to point at one and stare after one! To give the right to men I have snubbed and women who have hated me, to cut me in the street! To drop right out of my place in the world!"

"I don't want to minimize it. You are not of the pachydermatous order, but are sensitive and delicate. And these things will hurt you—horribly perhaps. But in life, one always has to pay the price. Vanna," he smiled fiercely, "surely if anything is worth the price, love is."

"I wonder!" she said, with a sigh of blended doubt and cynicism.

"You wonder?" he echoed. "Heavens! Do you know anything at all? And do you realize that you and I have another quarter of a century left to us in which love matters more than anything else? If you will not join your life with mine, we shall have to live this quar-



ter of a century apart, lonely, and lacking the only thing that matters."

"We can go on as we are doing now. I find life very tolerable—because of you, Morant."

"I find it quite intolerable—because of you, Vanna. No, it must be one thing or the other. Either I must cut the whole thing—never see you again, never think of you, make up my mind once for all that you do not exist for me any more than though you were dead—or you must join your life with mine in the only way possible to us."

"And spoil all that is best and dearest in our relation. Morant, let us be wise and clever and ideally selfish. At present there is always before us—a little Eden that we know we might have by stretching out our hands. And yet we know that to stretch out our hands and to take it, is like breaking a soap-bubble. The beauty and charm are gone at a touch. How many other couples in love have you and I not seen, who grasped their bubble in the way you propose, only to find it collapse? If love does not stand the test of marriage, it certainly does not stand the test of marriage with social ostracism and insult and all the other horrid things superadded. We are not stupid children, you and I. We want our story with some halo to it. Let us prolong our illusions—for another year, at all events."

"I won't do it. I can't do it. I tell you my life without you is a hell, a perpetual hunger to see you, to hear you, to be with you. No; you must do one thing or the other. You must come away with me or I must give you up wholly."

"We are not children, Morant, you and I. And we are clever enough and have had experience enough of life to know that the physical tie is not the best thing in love. As Mrs. Craigie cynically but truly says, 'In marriage, couples sometimes remain fond in spite of the physical tie!'"

He put his hand to his throat with the gesture of one stifling.

"My God, Vanna!" he said in a choking voice, "with a woman of your soul and subtlety, the physical tie would be no physical tie but—a miracle."

There was a long silence, broken only by his audible, harsh breathing. Then he added tensely:

"I can stand no more. You must promise, or I swear before heaven——"

A little jeweled hand flashed out.

"No, don't," she pleaded. "Don't make rash vows. Give me a little more time."

"Well, I will give you till the end of your visit here. But I swear by all my gods that if before you go you do not consent to join your life with mine, I will never again, if I can help it, see you or seek you, or think of you except as of one who has gone right out of my life. If you think I cannot do it, you are mistaken. I can and will. Suspense and half-measures I can stand no longer, but either extreme—heaven or hell—I can and will face. Vanna, I mean it. I was never more in earnest in my life. Since I am not a sultan, I have no alternative but to leave the choice with you."

"I almost wish you were a sultan," she said, and sighed softly, "to give me no choice, but to carry me off against my reason and my will."

"Only give me leave!"

She shook her head.

"That would make me still responsible."

"Come, Vanna, you are a strong and clever woman, well able to think and to decide for yourself. It is not as though you were an ordinary woman."

"If only I were," she cried. "If only my brain could be blinded to the truth—the truth that to yield as the ordinary woman might would be to bring the ordinary sordid consequences on us. Despise the world's opinion as we may, to be ostracized and flouted destroys one's

self-respect. You know as well as I do how people who have done this thing become demoralized. And you know how after a little while the man comes to feel a grudge against the woman because of the perpetual slights it brings on them."

"Such things soon blow over nowadays. And only a cur, not a man, would let her feel it."

"Life would be very different for women if they felt only the things intended for them to feel."

Her eyes became reflective.

"Morant, do you know the latest finding of science?"

"No. And I don't want to. Not just now, at all events. But give me your promise, and you shall have a whole quarter of a century in which to teach me the last findings of science and anything else you like to teach me."

She shook her beautiful head.

"I will tell you now, because it has a very important bearing on the case. Do you know that after all the centuries you men have been posing as the superior animal, you have been perpetuating a fraud. Science shows now that from the evolutionary standpoint Woman's is really and absolutely the superior sex: more subtle, more complex, more—everything that counts. She is the root-stock of the Race, the permanent way by which the train of Evolution travels. Man is only incidental, the plate-layer who administers and tends the route, and is of course—but only incidentally—one parent of the Race. For ten or twelve years the child depends on the mother for feeding and tendance and training. Man can take her place by power of imitation, but it is *her* place when all is said and done, the place assigned to her by Nature, and he can only take it partially and imperfectly. And as of course the Race is the only thing that matters, woman's is vastly the more important rôle in life. Motherhood is the machinery of Evolution, and woman 'is the Race,' as a scientist has recently expressed it."

"My dear Vanna," he protested. "Why in the name of reason are you telling me this rigmarole?"

"It isn't a rigmarole. It bears absolutely on the case. Because, as woman is the more important member of the human species and is the root-stock of the Race, all that she does or does not do, is of infinitely more consequence than what man does or leaves undone. All the essential responsibilities of life, and the whole responsibility of the relation of the sexes, rest with her. Beyond your material obligations, the relation of your sex to the Race is little more than that of the bee's relation to the flowers—transient and irresponsible. The very susceptibility to my sex on which you pride yourselves is merely a device on Nature's part to give woman a wider range in the selection of the father of her children."

"Heavens, Vanna! What has this to do with you and me?"

"Everything. Because it makes me—one of the responsible sex—chiefly responsible for our action. We women have the making and the keeping of the world's moral standards. When the women of a Race relax their standards the Race is doomed. All civilizations have gone under because when liberty has been given to women they have allowed it to lapse into license. I see nothing but chaos and disaster if we women of to-day allow license to creep into the sex-relation."

"A standard that forces two persons who have no affection for one another to remain shackled together for life is monstrous and unnatural."

"That's true, I admit. But we should change the law."

"It's going to be changed. Morality demands it. But the change will come too late for you and me to profit by it. Besides, to break it is our only way of protesting against and so reforming it."

"If one could be sure of that!" she said.

He moved nearer to her.

"Vanna, I never heard you speak before of motherhood. If you feel so responsible to the Race, how can you reconcile it to your conscience to deny it what your brains and beauty might do for it?"

Her face blanched. She shrank visibly.

"Don't talk of it!" she cried, almost violently.

She was taken with a strong emotion. She dropped her face into her hands, shivering as though with cold.

He remained silent, perplexed as to the cause of her distress.

She raised her head, showing her face still blanched, her eyes hard.

"Oh, go away!" she cried tensely. "Go to your wife, who has given you the noblest, most beautiful boy in the world." She added bitterly, more to herself than to him: "They never understand us—these men. They take us so lightly, take all we have to give, and when we have given think of it so lightly. Surely, Morant, surely a man can never be grateful enough for such a gift as Monica has given you—in Cyril."

He stared at her amazed.

"Vanna, I can't make you out this afternoon. The boy is a splendid chap, I know. But I never had a notion you thought so much of him, thought much of children at all."

"I don't," she said sharply. "I am not one of those whose be-all and end-all is motherhood. But my critical sense is strong, and I see that you should be eternally grateful to your wife for having given you this noble part in posterity, for having given you the greatest gift a woman can bestow upon a man—a noble child."

"There is one greater," he said passionately, "one he values more at all events—herself. But why do you champion Monica?"

"I don't. I merely champion my undervalued sex. And I see here a woman who has put her whole soul

into realizing a splendid human ideal, and I see the man she has privileged to take part in the realization of that ideal—" she paused and smiled upon him, and as though to put it beyond his power to do anything else, her smile was an enchanting one—"I see him making love to another woman."

The blood rushed to his face. He bit his lip.

"It's true," he said. "God help me, but I cannot help myself. It's irresistible."

With a charming movement of affection she stretched a hand across the space between them.

In words of raillery, enwrapped in tones of silver:

"You poor thing!" she said. "And you think it is you. All you men think it is yourselves. No doubt the bee thinks in lordly fashion that he chooses this flower and that from which to sip his honey, yet all the while he is a mere blind tool, drawn now to the lily and now to the rose for Nature's purposes. So you men are equally blind tools—by which Nature shapes her everlasting ends."

"I wish you were not so devilish clever," he said hotly.

"Why, so do I. But," she added, with the same blending of sweetness and raillery, "in that case, how your education would have suffered, my dear!"

He shrugged a massive shoulder.

"Mock as you will, Vanna, I am in your power, because I love you."

"I am not mocking. I am only thinking aloud, telling you what are the thoughts that come to me when these men flit about me like so many bees. I am afflicted with a brain too critical for my happiness, Morant."

"It's detestable of you, cold-blooded and abominable for a woman to accept one's devotion in such a spirit."

"It would be more amiable on my part to give my honey to every buzzing bee."

"No. That would be insufferable. But, Vanna, blind tool or no, be sure of this, that I both can and will break away from you unless you consent to do what I say."

"I know. That is your power with me, that still caring for me, you can yet, by strength of will, do without me. That is the test not only of your love, but of yourself. The moment a man of strong passions can choose with his brain whether or not he will obey them, he is worth taking into account. Morant, I find you very much worth taking into account."

"It is the eternal feminine in you," he retorted bitterly. "The thing there's a chance you can't get is the thing you want."

"The eternal masculine too! But honestly, I don't think that is my reason. It is my too critical brain which is at fault. Your power of resistance separates you at once from the other moths who are attracted by the lamp of my red head." She held up a warning finger. She looked at him with laughing eyes. "Mind, I do not allow you or any other man to call it red."

Lured by the playful and provocative charm of her, like one caught suddenly in the swirl of that blind force of which she had spoken, he made an impetuous stride toward her. Then, as though to exemplify his power of resistance, he set a curb upon himself, and turning his back strode away to one of the tall orange-curtained windows. Seeming to find the orange-perfumed atmosphere insufferable, he threw up the window and drew in a long breath of the fresh outer air.

There was silence between them. Then suddenly he turned again.

"Monica is coming across the lawn," he said. He added turbulently, "For God's sake, say 'Yes,' Vanna, and put me out of torment."

She raised her eyes, and swept his stormy features. Then she said in a low voice:

"I will give you my answer the morning I leave."

An angry gesture broke from him at being thus put off again. There was no time for words, however. He crossed the room, and with the forced pose of such feints (which deceive nobody) he made a show of examining the label of a handsome tree with golden-yellow globes looking like lighted lamps among its dark foliage.

Monica came in with a listless, depressed air, her face impassive, her eyes absorbed. There was nothing forced about the little start of surprise and the throe of mortification which set her features on finding her husband and Mrs. Ferrers together.

"Oh, I thought——" she said, and recovering herself, caught back one of the things good manners forbade her to say. For to seek solitude is unflattering to those whose presence cheats the quest.

Mrs. Ferrers was never at a loss. She smiled with friendly gaiety.

"We all did," she said. "This is such a charming place to be alone in, that first I, and then Lord Lygon, and now you have come to be alone here. Lord Lygon and I tried the next best thing to a few minutes' solitude—we sounded the praises of your beautiful Cyril."

Jealousy is the most blinding and distorting passion of the human mind. All things seen through it show false and blurred, like objects seen through troubled water.

The wife—convinced that these two had contrived their meeting and that they had been love-making—all at once unnerved, threw down her weapons. She dropped upon a sofa and buried her eyes in an arm, in that most pathetic attitude of woman, implying complete abandonment to hopeless fate, while at the same time hiding her eyes like a child, as though to shut that fate from her sight.

"My boy! My boy!" she cried, with a burst of tears.

There is a fashion in the world of masking sorrow as though it were a crime. It is a virtue—carried to



the excess wherein virtue becomes a vice. For not only to understand all is to forgive all, but strong and true feelings are green spots in the waste of life, the sight of which revives, refreshes, and dignifies our conceptions of human character.

Monica, concealing her heart behind a cold proud mask, was ineffective, even repellent. But the woman for a moment forgetting her pride and confessing her breaking heart to those who were breaking it, who abandoned herself to her grief and cried out with poignant sincerity for the last and only thing remaining to her, was dramatically effective.

Mrs. Ferrers knew the truth, that more even than for her beautiful boy this wife's heart was breaking for her husband. Lygon, on the contrary, had no suspicion that anything save Cyril's loss was moving her. But to see this proud cold wife of his, so hard and angry as he usually found her, melt suddenly like ice into a swift torrent of longing, stirred him strangely.

While he had been regarding her as all-sufficient for herself, strong enough to bear with cold composure the loss even of the boy who was so dear to her, that loss had been wreaking havoc in her. He saw in a flash that he had been mistaken in her: that not merely the natural maternal instinct which men take as a matter-of-course in women, but a passion of strong and vital emotion, a passion of which he had deemed her quite incapable, was involved in her devotion to her boy.

The emotional devastation now betrayed was a moving revelation.

He stood embarrassed, tugged at by throes of compassion and by something more intimate and perturbing. For her boy, on whom she thus poignantly called, was his likewise. Moreover, the moment in which her yearning had found this passionate expression was one in which he was straining every nerve to do her the greatest injury it lay in his power to do. He stood moved

but motionless, failing to find in his rush of impressions anything to say. The relations between them had been so long constrained that he would have had a difficulty in expressing sympathy even, and he felt something singularly more than this.

Mrs. Ferrers, always self-possessed and tactful, came to the rescue. She stepped gracefully across the room, and standing beside the distraught woman, laid a hand gently on one of hers.

But Monica, without looking up, shuddered away from her.

"Please leave me," she said in a choked voice. "I am ashamed to be so foolish."

Her rival interpreted her shuddering rejection. None knew better nor had better reason than she to know that of all the sentiments, jealousy is the most implacable. She glanced at Lygon, raised her brows, and shook her head, as though to signify that there was nothing further she could do. Then, with a little smile, compassionate and whimsical, she swept to the door, tact and her natural grace of feeling moving her to leave this husband and wife alone together.

But—she came back. Perhaps she feared to leave them thus alone together. Even within minutes of his passionate declaration, perhaps, knowing men, misgivings stirred as to her complete possession of him. She knew no doubt the welding force of strong emotion. Whatsoever the motive, plainly she would run no risk of losing him.

For with her sphinx-like, mysterious gaze and her whimsical smile, she turned at the door and came back. And just at the moment, when he had begun to move in Monica's direction, she laid a hand upon his arm, and looked into his eyes.

"Come," she said, in a voice audible to him only. "Better to leave her to herself."

And he went. For in the pressure of her hand and in her eyes there was a promise.

With the second sight, where her man is concerned, of the woman in love, Monica, her face hidden, having been conscious of a wave of softening and sympathy on his part, became now conscious of a void and blank. She looked up to find him gone—with Mrs. Ferrers!

## CHAPTER XVII

### MRS. FERRERS' ANSWER

**I**T was characteristic of Mrs. Ferrers, and a signal factor of her invincible charm, that beyond all things she was elusive. One never knew how he stood with her. Even in those rare moments when Lygon had held her in his arms, she escaped, as it were, in the spirit.

And always the alluring vision that escaped and stood tantalizing and bewitching just beyond his reach, appeared to be the most delectable and covetable of her attractions, so that although to him, as to other men, the delectable substance meant so much, he was tempted in such moments to drop it in order to come at the tantalizing vision.

And although he had held her for some moments in his arms one evening, he discovered the following morning that she was no more his than she had been the morning before.

There were about her a recoil and subtle changefulness which effaced all circumstance and eluded every sort of grip, leaving her perpetually fresh, intact, and novel; ever provocative and ever out of reach. Men are born hunters, but it is the love of the chase far more than the quarry which draws them. They do not risk their lives for the sake merely of an elephant's tusk, nor follow hounds for the value of a brush, but for the zest in their own prowess and the spur to the spirit which the chase supplies.

Mrs. Ferrers, with her subtle cleverness and her knowledge of men, had made a fine art of the woman's portion in the love-chase. Endowed with the triune powers of beauty, brains, and magnetism, she whipped up in her lovers a perpetual sense of imminent capture, now suffering them to come up with her, but yet at the moment when they stretched out a capturing hand, evading them and doubling back, though still with the flicker of an eyelash provoking them to follow.

Some dropped away and went in pursuit of less mettlesome charmers, for there are dull and stupid persons with no soul for sport, who if they hunt, hunt for the sake of a tusk, for a skin, or a meal. The majority of men whom she admitted to her train, however—for she had a clever eye for the quality of them—having once experienced the lure and inspiration of her rare and complex personality, of her wit and cleverness and rich magnetic charm, but beyond all of her master-craft in stimulating the imagination, found, after its delicate and intoxicating savors, the tame and cloying kisses of some more complaisant women, dull and crude.

For the imagination is the flower-garden of the passions, and Love is at a loss when he has no garden wherein to disport.

It was said of her that half the eligible and all the ineligible men of her acquaintance had proposed to her. For when a woman lays hold upon a man's imagination, she gets a grip upon his soul, and knitting herself up with the eternal and imperishable in him, her sway becomes invincible.

Although some outside it took the contrary for granted, every one of Mrs. Ferrers' train was assured of her dazzling impeccability—that is a thing about which men of the world but seldom make mistakes. This made her inestimably more unique and coveted, showing all her other charms as but the setting of a pearl beyond price.

For there is that in men of any account which keeps

their hearts upon the unattainable. Accordingly, with that pearl for lure, she was sorceress enough to keep her retinue of lovers loyal upon nothing more than a caressing syllable or an elusive pressure of the hand.

However, as Malet had detected, and as others too were coming to suspect about her, there showed at times a shadow on her brilliancy, a shadow as of some dark shape in the background of her life. And connecting the two things, it was coming to be believed that this shadow and her virtue (which nobody attributed to lack of temperament) sprang both from the same source.

People were beginning to whisper of a mystery about her, of broodings in her brilliant eyes that came and went without apparent cause, and of other subtle signs of secret trouble. It was suggested even that the shadow in the background might be a derelict, unacknowledged husband. This would account for her otherwise inexplicable resistance to men and to the fortunes they laid at her feet.

With her expert elusiveness, despite the seeming promise he had read in her eyes and the hand-clasp which had lured him from his wife, Lygon, during the remainder of her visit, was at a loss to know his fate with her. To his perturbed senses, now her looks said "Yes!" and raised him to a seventh heaven. Now they said "No!" and plunged him into desolation. He scarcely ate or slept, and feverishly counted the slowly lagging hours that stood as barriers between him and the knowledge of his destiny.

He did his utmost to contrive another meeting with her, but she was scrupulously careful not to be betrayed a second time.

During the rest of their visit the house-party were engaged in discussing and rehearsing their parts in the Pageant. Mrs. Ferrers, with her characteristic cleverness, so transformed the rôle of Eleanor, that to the

amazement and amusement of everybody, this became now by far the more important part in the drama.

Fair Rosamund, in Lady Lygon's hands, was quite subsidiary. For Monica, as she had told the Master of the Pageant, was but a poor actress, being too much herself and too strong an individuality to be able to personate another. She made a lovely victim, but the sympathies of the spectators would be with the brilliant and triumphant Queen.

Lygon, straining his powers to learn in her tones and glances some intimation of the fate she held above his head, wondered savagely whether she herself had yet made up her mind.

Her promise once given, he knew her well enough to be assured that she would abide by it, knowing too how lightly promises are made by those least likely to keep them.

Accordingly, from the moment in which his threat to break with her had wrung a promise from her, his brilliant company of guests collapsed about him like a house of playing cards, gaily colored gilt-edged court cards, kings and queens and knaves, and dropped upon the table in a little sheaf, with a queen of hearts uppermost and dominating all the others.

Long training and practice enabled him to discharge his duties as host instinctively, but it is as unlikely that some of his guests did not detect preoccupation in him, as it is improbable that they did not suspect a crisis between him and Mrs. Ferrers as the source of it.

Monica was at first all eyes and ears and burning heart for the change she saw in him. But after her distracted outburst in the Orangery, she relapsed into her mood of patience and despair. She knew that the climax had come, that the relation between these two, after long phases of fluctuation, had taken now a new departure, was now shaping to some definite end. She saw it was fruitless to strive with the inevitable.

She nerved herself, as Malet had advised her, by facing the worst. There was nothing further to be feared, since nothing was worse than the worst. Calm came again, and now remained with her—the calm of desolation. In it, however, her soul could find itself, although it found itself abandoned.

Her atmosphere of storm clearing, she saw with clearer vision; was able to feel compassion even for the restless, haggard man her husband had become beneath the stress of his anxieties.

And in her kinder and more generous mood, seeing him thus tormented, pity tempered her resentment. Sometimes even she felt hotly indignant with the woman who was causing him this suffering. For she, on her part, showed no sign at all of stress or agitation. Her brilliant eyes, her silver voice, her wit, her laughter, and her supple, graceful movements, queened it as before. It was as though she fed and flourished on the pain and stress of her admirers.

She showed no other signs of callousness, however. She devastated homes by diverting the homage of men from its legalized channels, but she did no worse. She held their honor in the hollow of her beautiful hand, but she held it scrupulously. She might have had all things, and she took nothing—as the world regards things. She had never been known to accept a jewel or any other tribute in kind from a lover.

She had sufficiently singled out Lygon from the rest as to convince Monica that she cared enough for him to marry him, had he been free to propose marriage to her. Accordingly, loving him as she did, now that she had let slip all hope of him for herself, she felt it poignantly bitter that she should prove his worst enemy, a barrier, perhaps insuperable, to his happiness.

Love and pity thus enlisting her, since she could do no more for him, she did her best to supplement his



disabilities, to cover such omissions and mental absences as his emotional absorptions betrayed him into.

Although no match for Mrs. Ferrers—for whom, indeed, one needed to range history to find a match—Monica was a clever woman: sufficiently clever as with her beauty to have attracted a little court about herself had she desired it. Accordingly, such aid as she now brought to Lygon was delicate and tactful. Once or twice he remarked it, and felt vaguely grateful and surprised at the change in her. He saw it as part of that new generosity which had moved her to receive Mrs. Ferrers at Travenhoe. He was stirred more than once to think regretfully upon the pity of it that he did not love her, good woman and lovely woman that she was.

Unfortunately for him, he had never found her interesting. He found her like a woman muffled in a veil. He did not clearly see her. She was remote and indefinite. She did not reveal herself. Mrs. Ferrers was remote, but it was with the arresting remoteness of one who stood upon a pedestal full and brilliant in the sight of all—albeit out of reach.

He was, as Malet had seen, no common philanderer to flatter himself upon his "affairs," but was on the contrary rather a grave and simple man who, since it was a necessity of his virile nature to be in love with some woman, would have been glad had that woman been his wife. Intrigue for the sake of intrigue had no attraction for him. He was too hot and passionate of blood to need the spur of the illicit.

On that last morning when the visit of the house-party came to an end, Mrs. Ferrers descended from her room a few minutes before her motor drove round. She never spoilt brilliant impressions by lengthy good-byes, nor traveled as one of returning house-parties. She made dazzling entrances and effective exits, arriving meteoric after all were assembled, vanishing meteoric

before others took their leave. She was too subtle in her methods to be stagey, but she permitted herself a certain artistic license.

At the moment of departure, upon bidding farewell to Lygon, who was metaphorically gnashing his teeth with wrath and disappointment—for it seemed that, after all, she was about to cheat him of his promise—she took from her muff a small white vellum-bound book and gave it to him.

"I had almost forgotten," she said carelessly. "Here is the book I promised to lend you. It is the finest poem I have read."

His hand went out for it and gripped it. For he knew that it contained—more even than the finest poem she had read. Yet even now he could not glean from her inscrutable eyes whether she had said him Yea or Nay.

Everything that happened afterward—until he found himself alone and free to learn his fate—was lost in a tempest of passion, out of which he smiled and talked as men do smile and talk in the teeth of crises, lest others see the blanching of their faces or their hands tremble.

But at last, having watched her whirl down the drive, the faithful and disconsolate pursuing at her motor-wheels with longing looks, he escaped to the library.

The book, released from his grip, fell open on a crimson rose-bud and a visiting card. And in a corner of this last was written in her clear fine hand:

*"The Gezirah Palace Hotel, Cairo, the last week in January."*

He kissed the card and kissed the rose-bud, kissed the book—passionately, feverishly, exultantly.

Then his teeth closed on a groan.

January! and this was but October! Oh, heart of steel!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### HUSBAND AND WIFE

**M**ORTAL power is limited. A man possesses no more than a definite quantum of nervous force for each day's expenditure in consciousness and action. This expended, unless he draw upon reserves, the springs of consciousness and action sink to a low ebb. By thus economizing its expenditure the body is able to recruit its powers from day to day.

Lygon, who during Mrs. Ferrers' visit had made a large draft upon his nervous resources to feed his emotional agitations, now that her stimulating presence was withdrawn, fell into a phase of apathy. For now he lacked even the goad of suspense. She had promised—had named a date, and a long, dull interval of waiting stretched before him. This lethargy, succeeding upon storm, gave temporary sleep to his passions, soothing and quieting his whole being.

In a manner, he and Monica were in like psychological case, fatigued and spiritless, but for the first time for years with no steel armor of pride nor prick of irritation between them. She was resigned to lose him, he was remorseful to be on the point of betraying her, and both were weary after long struggle.

In order to discharge his new function of Master of Hounds, it was necessary that he should be in residence for much of his time at Travenhoe. And Travenhoe—which he had previously visited but seldom—Monica

loved and had made her home. They proceeded accordingly to enter into joint occupation of it upon their new and altered terms.

On that day when left alone together by the departure of their last guest—Glubb, by the way, who had lingered last because his yellow butterfly had lingered till the next to last, only, however, to his speechless indignation, to flutter off inconsequent, without hint of renewing his acquaintance—Lygon was absent all day upon duties connected with the hunt. He returned to dine, and he and Monica sat down to table in a rather awkward silence. He looked fagged and moody, she pale and depressed.

At a moment when her eyes were dropped upon her soup, his fastened on her in a long, close gaze. Then his dropped likewise to his plate. He stirred uneasily in his chair. He had never before seen her with that look on her face. All the fretfulness and temper had gone out of it. She showed desperately unhappy.

She was grieving still, he thought, about the boy. The boy's loss had cut her up sadly. He had a sense of guilt about it, although he felt her pain on this account was unavoidable. A boy could not live forever at his mother's apron-strings. The world, with its large fields of active interest and occupation, was the place for men. Boys were men in the making, and the sooner their licking into shape to fit them for their place in life began—the better for them.

This thing could no more be helped, he reflected, the boy's turning out of his nursery and his abandonment of his mother, than it could be helped that women must send out their men to wars and explorations and other enterprises in which they lost their lives and—incidentally—broke their women's hearts.

There was a song that told how "Men must work and women must weep." Cyril would not need to work, of course, so far as money was concerned, but he must go.

to school now, and later take up soldiering or something to make a man of him.

He wished, however, that she would not take the thing so badly. That she did so, rubbed it sorely into his conscience that he was about to deal her a last deadly blow. He had been thinking it over all day, and he had decided to let her keep Travenhoe for herself and Cyril, and to dispose otherwise handsomely for her. This was the least he could do. And, of course, she would soon get over the shock, and would settle down happily, with Cyril coming home to her for the holidays. He would miss the boy badly himself—but it was no use thinking about that. In life one had always to give up something in order to gain another thing he wanted more.

He began to talk, to tell her something of the day's doings, of persons he had met, gossip he had heard. Instinctively, as a result of his new-born compunction, his voice and manner took new kindness into them.

She responded cheerfully and with equal friendliness, although a trace of diffidence betrayed itself from time to time.

Presently he kept silence, of intention. He wanted her to speak of Cyril. It would relieve her, he thought, to talk of her distress. And he wished to tell her he was sorry she was feeling it so badly. He remembered how he had been impatient with her, had pooh-poohed her objections and taken her trouble too lightly. It was a failing of his, he knew, to be impatient and brusque when he was confident of being right as he had been in the affair of Cyril's going to school.

When she broke the silence, she did not speak of Cyril, however. Rather, as though making conversation for a guest, she asked him, with a twitch about her mouth, whether he had remarked Professor Glubb's devotion to little Mrs. Talboys.

"Last night in the drawing-room, before the men

came in, every one was teasing her about him," she said.

"No. I did not notice it. He's a bit of a bore, isn't he?"

She laughed.

"He might be interesting on archæology, if only one could have got him to talk about it. I had taken some pains to read up his last book, but I could not get a word from him upon the subject."

"These chaps think it bad form to talk shop, no doubt. And I suppose it is. Did he help them with the Pageant?"

"Scarcely at all. It seemed as though he couldn't apply his knowledge. He made one think of an old cumbersome telescope too stiff and heavy to adjust."

Then, finding herself talking easily and spontaneously as she had not talked with him for years, a sense of awkwardness invaded her. She fell back again on silence.

At the end of the meal—the first meal they had made alone for years without constraint, without some irritation or discussion, bred of their strained relations and born of her temper or pride, or of his temper and restiveness under the curb of her pride—as though recognizing that they had entered upon an unspoken truce, she said "Good-night" in passing him; and saying it her eyes sought his for a moment, and then dropped.

Their nightly parting after dinner—for unless there were guests with them, he did not follow her to the drawing-room—was frequently made without any spoken recognition; she rising in her chair to pass him haughtily, while he rose with cold ceremony to open the door for her.

"Good-night," he answered gravely, glancing at her as she passed. Then there was that upon his conscience which made him lower his eyes. But his voice was kind.

When she had gone he sat down again, to smoke, to finish his wine, and to think of Mrs. Ferrers.

While she, loving him so much, departed happy, because though loving him so much she had not quarreled with him. For it is easy enough, not caring, to be gay and complaisant, but so very difficult when one and only one—and that one proud and sore of heart—cares.

They met next at luncheon on the following day, Monica breakfasting always in her room.

His lethargy had now got hold upon him, and he was dull and silent. For, his conscience keeping up a grumbling jangle with his anticipations, he found little to say.

Monica, however, had heard from Cyril, and she had much to say about this, and for the first time since the boy's departure, gave him no word of reproach.

"He writes in spirits," she told him, although reading between the lines she knew that for some reason the boy was not happy.

"Oh, he has shaken down, of course. He'll like school well enough when he is used to it. May I have his letter?"

She passed it to him. His face lightened as he read. This was a fine chap—this boy of his! If his mother had made too much of him, she had not spoiled him. He wrote with spirit and gay-heartedness, had already picked up some school slang and garnished his pages with terms such as "rotter" and "jaw" and "muck," clearly taking as much pride in his new tongue as some men take in Greek or French.

There was a "man" in his house he'd have to lick if he went on ragging as he did, a big soft mug of a chap he was sure he could double up like anything, thanks to Jackson's boxing lessons. He had taken to his thicker vests as she had bidden him, because there had been a frost. Young Vernon Cochrane was in his house, but you wouldn't know him for the chap he was at home.

Little Walton was up too; slept in the bed next to his. He cried himself to sleep every night because he was

home-sick. He was such a small chap to be on his own, and the boys ragged him all the time because he cried, and because there was something wrong with the shape of his collars. He (Cyril) had been going to speak to Mrs. Blank (the house-master's wife) about him, and ask her to cheer him up a bit, only he heard her tell "The Dolphin"—she was a housemaid the chaps called "The Dolphin" because she'd never seen the sea—and he heard Mrs. Blank tell her the boys were nothing but a pack of nuisances, and she was always thankful to see the last of them; and so he thought she wouldn't mind whether little Walton felt wretched or not.

He was trying to tell him *Treasure Island* to stop him thinking about home, but he seemed rather frightened of pirates, and thought perhaps there might be some lurking round Eton to carry boys off and force them to be pirates whether they liked it or not.

He (Cyril) had had a horrid headache, and they gave him some medicine that tasted beastly, but next day his headache was gone. He shouldn't eat so many strawberry ices again, but a chap had shown him where you could get strawberry ices that were just top-hole.

He made searching inquiries about his pony, his dog, and his squirrels. If that chap Sam neglected them, he'd get a jolly wiggling instead of a clinking tip. Mother wasn't to think he felt home-sick. Of course he missed her; how could any one help missing a mother like her? But he'd got heaps to do, his arithmetic was simply rotten; and some of the fellows were beastly about his hair curling—as though you could help it when you were born like it. He was brushing it hard and often with soap and water, and it stopped nice and flat as long as it was wet. Couldn't he have some of that gummy stuff Morton used for Dad's moustache, to make it nice and flat like other chaps'?

She wasn't to worry about him, because it would soon be the holidays. And the time passed quicker when you



didn't tick off the days with a pencil every morning, as some of the fellows did.

It would be topping to see Dad again, and to hunt with him now he was "Master." Tell Dad he'd grown an eighth of an inch since he was last measured, and the games-master said he was built for running and could take a place in the sports.

There was more, his long letter being no labored composition, but a spontaneous brimming over of the mind of the writer into that of the sympathetic reader.

"I am glad he's going in for sports," his father said, when he came to the end. "It will make a man of him."

She shook her head dubiously.

"I hope he will not overdo it. I read the other day that a German scientist had been examining the hearts of schoolboys after athletic exercises, and found them nearly always dilated. And to dilate them frequently like this permanently weakens them, he said. His opinion was, that overdoing games is the cause of our modern young men being so limp and characterless."

"Oh," he objected lightly, "there's always some fad-dist or another discovering things nobody ever discovered before. And we got on all right the old way."

"And Cyril is so strong and healthy," she agreed hopefully. "One need not be anxious. But what do these horrid boys mean by disliking his hair? It is beautiful, and that little kink in it is simply lovely."

He smiled at her maternal fervor.

"Boys are terrible sticklers for form. They kick against anything out of the common. I remember there was a youngster in my house, whose father insisted on his wearing coats with a lapel cut a bit differently from the rest of us. We made his life a perfect hell about it. He got a nervous breakdown at last, and had to leave."

"But you did not join in persecuting the poor little chap."

"No doubt I did. I can't remember. But school-boys are like bears with sore heads. They are always kicking so much inwardly against school-life that they vent their spite on any one who gives them a chance. We're barbarians of course at that age. They say there is no cruelty or atrocity a group of schoolboys won't commit, if only they have the opportunity."

"It is because they have no home influences to soften and refine them. Of course, school-life isn't what the books call a natural environment."

"Oh," he said tersely, "books always go in for counsels of perfection. The schools turn out some first-rate men. Mixing with their kind licks 'em into shape."

"They say day-schools are the best way of educating children, because they mix with other children and still have home influences."

"Well, we can't all migrate to Eton and Harrow and Rugby, so Mahomet must go to the mountain."

Then, the thought occurring that good day-schools might be established everywhere, he changed the subject suddenly, lest this should occur to her too.

Men dislike being worsted in argument by women, because realizing that there are some questions they understand vastly better than women do, they do not realize that there are, on the other hand, questions which women understand vastly better than themselves.

A test of inherent sympathy between two persons is their ability so sit together in silence without sense of awkwardness or irritation. The nervous atmosphere (or "aura," as occultists style it) which radiates from every one of us is all the while meeting and commingling with that of others in our neighborhood. When we sit silent in their company, the fact that our attention is not distracted by talk, causes their nervous atmospheres to become more or less perceptible to us, and we find them sympathetic or antipathetic.

It was long since the Lygons had been able to sit alone together without getting upon one another's nerves, a result of the temperamental war between them. Accordingly, taught by experience, Lygon had learned to escape this unpleasing one by betaking himself to a library or smoke-room or gun-room at the conclusion of a meal or of any other amenity that had brought them together.

Even now, when just as their relation had come within hailing distance of irrevocable parting, to his perplexity they seemed to have entered upon a new phase of friendliness, he still kept up the habit, and the meal or other cause that had brought them together being concluded, went off to his own pursuits.

One afternoon, wishing to have her opinion upon some trifling matter, he sought her in the beautiful larger drawing-room.

It showed deserted, and the expanse of cultured and adorned solitude allured him. It faced west, and through a broad old mullioned window, beyond the velvet lawns and grand historic trees, there was seen an avenue of beeches, at the end of which the sun, a ball of ruddy fire, was sinking slowly amid clouds of glory.

The room was filled with rosy light. Bowls of flowers richly perfumed it. Spreading fronds of palm made green and shaded nooks of peace. Luxurious chairs and a divan, downily cushioned, tempted to languorous ease.

He flung himself into the first chair that offered, and gave rein to thought.

When he had last been here, Mrs. Ferrers had been present. Her splendid whiteness set off by a robe of black, she had sat most of the evening on the divan, her beauty and distinction transforming it into a throne, about which her courtiers gathered. He thought of her as a second de Récamier for wit and intellect, but more arrestingly beautiful and richer in magnetic charm.

She recalled those days when women were a power

to reckon with, when the drawing-room was a *salon* of cultured and brilliant conversation, in which men vied with one another for the favor of a privileged sex, their weapons flashing wit and polished tongue, each bringing to the intellectual and temperamental feast his unique and welcome offering, some rich, lucid reflection (a diamond chipped from the brain), some crisp, finely chiseled anecdote, or a bon mot of humor; and pervading all, the bubble and sparkle of zest and enthusiasm.

How things had changed! Modern entertainments, since women had abrogated their queendom to mingle hugger-mugger with the crowd, smacked more or less of the menagerie, men and women talking one another down, pushing for viands and laughing boisterously.

Half the art of conversation was the art of listening gracefully, and this most charming talent became every day more rare, since every day men and women became more self-centered, and eagerly preoccupied with some or another fad or craze to force perpetually upon their neighbors.

Mrs. Ferrers changed all that. Wheresoever she was, her personality dominated, her atmosphere infected, her charm and wit held spell-bound listeners. In the most crowded drawing-room, were she a guest, there was always a *salon*, a center of dignified calm and distinction and culture, where men were on their best behavior and in their best vein, finding something worth saying and saying it well. For she was a never-failing fount of inspiration.

What a change she had wrought in himself, for example! How, since knowing her, his whole viewpoint of life had been transformed! How crude, unthinking, unenlightened, he had previously been, seeking and finding zest in things that now showed trivial and unworthy.

His passions hypnotized by his reactionary lethargy, he thought more clearly and critically than had been his wont.

Yet, under his thoughts, there ran a deep current of passionate stillness, knowing this peerless creature about to be his, to have and to hold until death should part them.

There came surges at intervals, impelling him to rise and do great things for her sake, to show himself worthy of her, turning to account the restless forces of undifferentiated power whereof she had first made him conscious in himself.

He felt that there was nothing in the world he could not do nor would not dare, with her beside him to inspire and quicken him.

He rose now in his chair, goaded by such a surge of impulse. He crushed it down, and dropped back listlessly, knowing it impossible for him to apply himself to any purpose, knowing his forces for the nonce too headstrong and turbulent for exploitation.

Later, with her beside him, he hoped, before God, to prove himself of some account. He was sick to death of merely killing time—and birds. For he was now at that turning-point of his career when, halfway up the hill of life, a man's character acquires a fine aspiring impulse or begins to run downhill rapidly.

At this phase of his reflections, he thrust her from them. Between them stood a block of two long solid months.

The quiet of the room imparted some of its tranquillity. Monica was right! Travenhoe was an admirable place, the air, the site, the fine old dignified house. It was a place to be alone in; there was atmosphere about it, atmosphere that was as good even as the best company—except, of course, that company of two which enchanted.

It was long since he had been alone for a week at a time in such a backwater of life as this was, out of the hurly-burly, the functions, the crowds, and the clubs of town existence. He was tiring of crowds. It was a sign,

no doubt, that he was growing middle-aged. Things he had taken zest in had begun to pall. It was time he should put away childish things.

Monica was right in liking Travenhoe. Travenhoe suited her. She was calm and dignified. The modern fever of unrest had not infected her. He admired always the grace with which she sat in her carriage—as the great ladies of an older generation did, high-bred and serene, with the fine poise of powers in balance, in no way resembling impassiveness.

Women were losing the art of sitting in a carriage. In the parks one saw them fussing and fidgeting, moving their hands, or jerking their heads and chattering restlessly. Few but the old women nowadays knew how to sit with graceful calm.

Monica's dignity suited Travenhoe. He was glad to think, as some atonement for his impending desertion of her, that she would have Travenhoe.

He reflected upon the change that had come to her. They would have got on better had it come earlier. Perhaps if she had cared for him they might have been happy enough.

But yet, when Mrs. Ferrers had come, things must have turned out as they were about to do. Such a passion was irresistible. And—Heaven knew!—it was something to be profoundly thankful for that Monica had never cared for him, or now he would be dealing her a blow no less than dastardly.

So his thoughts drifted and shifted.

He became conscious of a soft annealing influence—a lovely influence, appreciable yet subtle and intangible as thought. It was sweet, was calming, was inspiring. What was it? Whence was it? It made no impress upon any sense. It took no mental shape. It was like some exquisite spiritual caress, the laying of a tender hand upon his soul. For the first time in his life—

defining it amid the intricacies of his consciousness—he became aware of his soul as an intrinsic part of him.

He wondered whether this most lovely influence could be a telepathic effluence from Vanna. Had some fond thought of hers, a need of him, flashed an electric current through the distance separating them, annihilating time and space?

Suddenly, without cause or motive, but as we turn, unknowing why we do so, to meet eyes fixed upon us from a distance, he rose and moved to where, some dozen yards away, a velvet curtain screened a window-corner.

His wife was sitting there. She had been reading, but now her book lay on her knee. Her face was turned away, as his had been, toward the sunset. There was a rapt, uplifted look on that of it which he could see, her mouth was smiling tenderly as he had never seen her smile. He caught the shine of wetness on a cheek, as though tears she was unaware of had been softly falling.

In her absorption, his feet moving soundless on the thick carpet, she did not hear him. He stepped back instantly, and quitted the room.

The blood rushed to his face as he went. He went abased. Within some yards of her, and she with that rapt tenderness upon her face—thinking, no doubt, of Cyril—he had been breeding his thoughts of treason.

He put thought from him, and went for a long tramp.

But there went with him a certain peevish anger that this change should have come to her just now when it was most of all inopportune. Her former pride and hardness would have left him so much less compunctious in deserting her, than did this new gentleness and sorrow in her.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CARRY JEALOUS

**T**HE instant Malet, on his return to "Roseberry," saw Carry's face, he knew that something had happened during his absence—something which, it seemed, had brought her primal instincts uppermost.

For, on seeing him, she was taken suddenly with one of her strange paroxysms of rigidity. Her eyes narrowed under her drooped lids. She reared her small flat head upon her supple neck, with that curious effect of preparing to dart. He took it for a rekindling of her old aversion, an aversion which before his visit had seemed to have been waning. He surmised that his visit, and her sense of being slighted by Lady Lygon, had resuscitated it.

He had taken his leave on the afternoon preceding the break-up of the house-party.

At "Roseberry" tea was set, and he walked into the drawing-room to find Carry engaged, as was her habit, in re-setting her cups and dishes more to her exacting taste.

"Oh! so you have come back?" she greeted him frostily.

She advanced some steps, and extended her hand as though it had been a barrier between them.

"I've come back, of course," he answered rather testily; the excitement, the late hours, and perhaps the luxurious living at Travenhoe having been, but most of all this reception of hers being, a trial to his nerves.



"I didn't intend to make my abode indefinitely with the Lygons."

In dealing with disagreeable persons it is as well to deal with them in their own coin. Her face became some shades less hostile, and when she spoke her voice had thawed.

"Oh, of course not. I knew you were to come to-day. But as you did not let me know, I thought perhaps you wouldn't be able to tear yourself away till after tea."

"Peter all right, and Elfie?"

"Elfie is not very well. As to Peter, you should know more of him than I do, seeing the amount of time he has spent up there."

"Up where? At Travenhoe? I don't know how I managed to miss him then."

"No doubt he was otherwise engaged," she said caustically—"with such a fascinating patient on his hands."

After a pause she asked tensely:

"What is this Mrs. Ferrers *really* like? Is she *really* such a marvel?"

Malet had too much tact to make a practice of praising one woman to another without due mitigation of fervor. But since Carry had chosen to be frankly disagreeable, he saw no reason for favoring her with his best manners. Accordingly he took no pains to temper his enthusiasm.

"Yes, she is phenomenal," he said. "I can't say that I have ever seen her equal in any way. She is clever and beautiful, and altogether charming."

A silence he felt to be electric drew his attention to her. Her flat brows, with the black-lead hair plastered low and smoothly on them, seemed to have grown curiously flatter. All expression had quitted her face, leaving it dully blank. She sat in the electric silence, turning a cup in its saucer deftly and soundlessly, her thoughts absorbed.

Then she raised her eyes, and said sibilantly:

"So you, too, are infatuated with her, then?"

"'Infatuated' is a strong word," he returned, mystified by all this. "I certainly admire her. But who is the other guilty man you pair me with?"

"Do you mean who else is infatuated with her?" She laughed bitterly. "It's plain you were telling the truth when you said you hadn't seen much of Peter. Did Mrs. Ferrers really sprain a wrist?"

Her face and voice were venomous. He supposed her to be suffering from some extraordinary misapprehension—for he had only once seen Corry at Travenhoe in addition to having heard him once announced to Mrs. Ferrers. The one occasion on which he had seen him there, had been that morning, when he had met him and Mrs. Ferrers in close conversation in the fir wood. He had thought nothing of this, save that Corry was paying his last professional respects to her delectable wrist.

"I think if you ask Peter himself, you will find he hasn't spent so much time at Travenhoe as you seem to suppose, Carry, or as he seems to have represented. I can't think how you have got such a notion."

She laughed now, not very naturally.

"Of course I am not in earnest. But Peter has been raving quite absurdly all the week about the woman. And a perfectly ridiculous fuss seems to have been made about her wrist. I know how these smart, fast, flirting women parade their illnesses to get sympathy from men."

"Peter must certainly have been raving absurdly," Malet said in a dry voice, "if he has given you an impression that Mrs. Ferrers is a 'smart, fast, flirting woman.' It doesn't at all describe her."

She laughed again—no pleasing sound.

"Plainly, she knows how to fool your sex." She added, "Perhaps you are not aware that Peter knew her before she came here. That seems to me to show her sprained wrist in a different light. Perhaps to people with their wits about them, it shows her visit here in

a different light. She has never before been to Travenhoe."

Malet was a kind man, and a man of sympathetic imagination. Seeing that she made so grave a thing of it, he did not laugh as he might otherwise have done at the notion, which seemed to him no less than monstrous, that Mrs. Ferrers, the most admired woman of her day, one to whom crowned heads paid court, and whom all honored—if not all delighted to do so—should have come to Travenhoe on Carry's account.

Knowing, further, the fact of hers and Lygon's attachment, he saw nothing more in Carry's suggestion than the misconception of a shrewd and clever little woman transformed by jealousy into a crassly unreasonable one.

He observed quietly that Peter had no doubt met Mrs. Ferrers in his professional capacity, not being a frequenter of smart and distinguished society.

The fact interested him, however, and he made a mental note to learn more from Peter, anon. For despite his X-ray penetration, he was as much in the dark as before, and even more curious, concerning the mystery which he suspected as attaching to her.

"Here is Peter," Carry said suddenly. "But don't, for goodness' sake, let him find us talking of her, or it will set him off again. And I'm sick to death of being told of her miraculous perfections."

Something had happened to Peter also, Malet saw. He lounged in, hands in pockets, with such an overdone air of being at his ease and in his usual spirits, that Malet thought he had not often seen a pose less convincing. Above his forced smile, his blue eyes sought Carry's with an embarrassment trenching on the comic. It was plain that the something which had happened had considerably disturbed their cordial relations.

"Hello, Car!" he hailed her, with an ineffective counterfeited of his accustomed jovial manner. Then perceiv-

ing his uncle his face brightened with obvious relief—it seemed because he was to be spared a *tête-à-tête* confabulation with his wife.

“Hello, Uncle Chris!” He shook him warmly by the hand. “Delighted to have you back again. We have missed you. But you’ve been having no end of a good time up there, no doubt. You’ll find us frightfully small ale after it. You look a bit hipped, though. Let me mix you a draught.”

“No, thanks. When I need doses, I select my own poisons from my own modest armamentum. Yes, I enjoyed my visit. But I am glad to be back. A week of restive idleness is as much as I can stand.”

Carry having now made tea, there followed the customary interruption of passing cups and muffins. Then they settled down to talk.

“I suppose the women up there wore lovely frocks at dinner,” Carry said, “and gorgeous tea-gowns in the afternoon.”

Malet responded that they seemed to be very well dressed.

“Could you describe any frock that particularly struck you?” Her eyes sparkled with zest in the latest vagaries of Fashion, that phoenix which perpetually dies only to be perpetually reborn from its own ashes.

“Heavens, don’t ask me! I noticed at the time a number of dresses that seemed to me to be excellent of their kind, but I couldn’t for the life of me describe a particular one.”

“But the jewels? You would see some magnificent jewels.”

Her eyes, under her flat brows, were round and eager now. They reminded him of Elfie’s. Elfie had inherited her keenness from her mother. For the moment she looked very girlish. He remembered that of which, in the presence of some other qualities of hers, he was

always needing to remind himself, that she was in point of fact quite youthful as regarded years.

Peter's easy-humored, easy-going habits—to conscientious to neglect his duties, and yet by never doing one iota more than was absolutely required of him, throwing upon others, and particularly upon Carry, the burden of the hundred-and-one things over and above the strictly necessary—were making her careworn and old before her time. Her youth and nature called for ease and play in order to preserve her from becoming too strenuous and practical.

The interest she now showed in clothes and jewels was natural and fitting to her sex and age.

He smiled in sympathy, and described the beautiful setting of some emeralds Mrs. Ferrers had worn one evening, a setting in brilliants and silver which had seemed to him unusually artistic.

"Who wore them?" Peter asked suddenly.

Malet, glancing at him, saw a new self-consciousness and quickened interest in him; moreover a shadow of concealment; sentiments which, Carry likewise perceiving them, had doubtless bred her jealous suspicions. Accordingly he did not humor him by speaking the name he suspected him of wishing to hear.

"Oh, one or other of the ladies," he returned. "And Lady Lygon one night wore some magnificent gray diamonds."

"Gray diamonds! I have never even heard of gray diamonds," Carry said. She added wistfully, "How nice it must be to have such lovely clothes and things! It is easy to be always attractive when you have nothing else to do, and no worse worries on your mind than which of your pretty frocks you will wear next."

She cast a half-reproachful sidelong glance at Peter, at once enlisting Malet's soft heart on her side as regarded the silly fellow's self-consciousness and diverted interest.

"Oh, well," he said kindly, "everybody's shoe pinches somewhere. All these seemingly fortunate persons who appear to have everything they want in life, have some disability or grief or worry that fairly balances things. Unalloyed happiness does not exist."

Carry shook her head dissentingly.

"It must be delightful to get up in the morning without anything to do but just enjoy yourself, no cook to scold for being drunk, or to hunt for a new parlor-maid, or hustle a gardener, and horrid things of that sort."

"Why, I thought you enjoyed housekeeping," Peter observed lightly. "I thought you took a pride in having the house nice. And with servants enough, as we have, it ought to be easy enough."

"Well, it isn't!" she retorted. "It means having your mind always on the stretch. And how can you help being cross and irritable when your mind is on the stretch? It's not difficult to be bright and interesting when you have no worries—and when you are surrounded all the time by adoring admirers," she added caustically.

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"Great Scott!" he said. "Don't bring it round again to Mrs. Ferrers. I say, Uncle, can anybody help admiring Mrs. Ferrers? Isn't she just—tip-top? I put it to you candidly. Tell Carry whether anyone could help it."

"Oh, he has told me," Carry rejoined bitterly. "But for goodness' sake don't let us talk about her. I'm sick of her very name."

"Well, it's your own fault. You will keep dragging her into everything."

"I? How can you say so? It's you all the time. Was it I who said she was perfectly stunning, that she was the cleverest woman in London, that her hands were like alabaster—and all the other ridiculous things? Why, even just now you said she was"—she ended in a sort of sob—"tip-top."

"I never said her hands were like alabaster," he contradicted hotly. "I've never seen alabaster, and haven't a notion what it's like. You just turn and twist everything to suit your own purposes. You might at least be truthful."

"You talk of truthfulness! I could never have believed you could be so deceitful. Getting her to address her letters to your Club! No doubt you pose to her as a rich bachelor. It's like goings on in the Divorce Court."

Peter gulped down what remained to him of tea, and jumped angrily to his feet.

"Here, I say, I'm going!" he blurted. "I don't know what has come to you. You don't care what you say about that woman. And such rubbish as it all is! It was only a professional letter. You've got no business to pry into my letters. I won't have you asking for my letters at the Club, and so I tell you!"

He flung out of the room.

"A professional letter!" she called after him. "Why couldn't she write here about her silly wrist, if she wanted to?"

Malet sat amazed before this shattering of domestic concord. A week ago these two had been all harmony and happy comradeship. And here they were now, going hammer and tongs at one another in distressing earnest.

"My dear Carry," Malet said pacifically—"what is it all about? You can't keep a man from admiring a handsome woman, you know. And Mrs. Ferrers is leaving Travenhoe to-morrow, and Peter may never set eyes on her again."

"Oh, that isn't at all likely. As though she won't write to him! She'll write to him at the Club, as she has done already. Does that look straightforward?"

"Heavens! Mrs. Ferrers! Do you think such a woman would give Peter a serious thought? She has far more admirers—men of the highest rank and position—than she knows how to deal with."

"She's a fast, bad woman!" she protested. "Why doesn't she keep to the men of her own set, and not make a fool of Peter? Because, of course, she can be only fooling him, and is not really in love with him."

"I think you may take it as truth," he said, smiling slightly, "that Mrs. Ferrers is not in love with Peter. So don't give the matter another thought, my dear girl."

"Men always back up one another! And I know you and Peter will do nothing now but talk of Mrs. Ferrers' eyes, and Mrs. Ferrers' brains, and her figure, and her red hair. I saw her out driving one day, and I couldn't see anything so frightfully special about her. There are heaps of women quite as good-looking, only they don't put on the airs of being the only person in the world; and they can't afford to wear such clothes."

There was nothing to be done with her in this mood. He changed the subject.

"By the way, did you happen to see the Duchess of Skye in her harem-trousers?" he inquired, as a diversion likely to appeal to her.

But she was not to be pacified.

"No, I didn't," she retorted, "and I don't want to. They seem to have been a queer lot up there, and nice goings on, I must say. Lady Lygon ought to be ashamed to allow such things in her house."

He rose.

"I'll go and unpack."

She remembered her manners.

"I am sorry your room isn't ready for you yet," she told him. "So you are still sleeping on the top floor. And I'm sorry you've had such a horrid, disagreeable tea. But Peter has been going on so ever since he came under that abominable woman's influence."



## CHAPTER XX

PETER MOON-STRUCK

**O**N the top landing Malet came upon a little, lonely, silent figure with dark tangled hair and shining solemn eyes, clutching eager-handed to the nursery-gate that barred her from the world of life. Her small peaked face was thrust as far as it would go through the space between two of its relentless bars.

"Is that you, Little Boy?" she greeted him, a spasm of excitement stiffening her as the top of his head came in view.

He looked up to meet her shining, deep-set eyes.

"And have you come to play wiv me again? Nan-nie's down stairs talking to Fritz, and there's nobody here to play wiv me for all this time."

She extended her small sticks of arms to denote a gulf immeasurable.

He opened the nursery-gate, and took her by a cold little hand. With her feeble vitality, her hands were always cold.

"Why, Elfie," he said, "are you all alone? Yes, I have come back to play with you."

"Have you brought anyfing for me in your pockets, Little Boy?"

He confessed—with some abasement—that he had not. There were coins of the realm there, but he did not deem these offerings suited to the Age of Innocence. He resolved that the next time he should climb the stairs he would certainly bring gifts.

Her eager spirit shrank within its frail sheath, sensitively, to find that she had been forgotten. He saw that her hunger for gifts was a cry of the heart, rather than mere inquisitiveness. He saw, too, that whatsoever he might bring her, it would be inadequate, since it could never fulfil that yearning of her child-heart which looked out through her eyes, and beyond, to that great kingdom of the Imagined, which is never realized.

Her little nervous fingers gripping at his with a suggestion that she would not readily let him go again, he took her to his room, and, seating himself, set her upon a knee.

"Well, little woman," he said, "and what have you been up to all this time?"

She was of the sort which lives a-tip-toe for to-morrow, and wastes but little time on yesterday. Invited to a retrospect, she cast back a hasty glance, however.

"Having tea," she said. "And Nannie put me in the corner."

"Why?"

"Cos I wouldn't say, 'Fank God for my nice tea!' Do you say grace?"

"But why wouldn't you?"

She shook her head. Her expression became evasive.

"I don't yike to," she said with a sensitive flush. "It's silly when He wasn't there."

She flushed still deeper, as though the subject trenched on her reserves.

"But perhaps He was, although you couldn't see Him."

She glanced about her with a scared look.

"I don't yike Him," she said in a frightened whisper.

"Why doesn't He ever come out?"

Malet supplied no reason.

"Has He got sharp teef like the fox in my picture-book, Little Boy?" She clutched his arm nervously.

It was cruel, he reflected, to have forced the mystery of the Incomprehensible upon this baby-mind. But the

mischievous having been done with the result merely of raising a bogey in it, he did his best to lay the specter.

Her fears brought home to him the value of the idol for the immature mind, infant in time or in years. It was more consolatory and less alarming to have your god, beautiful or ugly, in concrete form upon a shelf, than it was to have him lurking amid twilight shadows of the brain, inchoate and terrorizing.

Having some books with him, he bethought him of a picture in one of them, the picture of an angel of a lovely countenance, with stars about his head and white wings folded tenderly, and a little crippled child upon his breast.

He brought the book and opened it at this picture.

"God is like that," he told her. "See how kind He looks! He is carrying the little girl because she is lame and cannot walk."

At first she would not look, but cowered and trembled.

"I don't yike Him," she repeated. "He makes noises in the cupboard when it's dark—when Nannie's gone."

"No, no. That is only a little brown mouse, not God."

At last he persuaded her to give a fleeting, frightened glance. The gentle figure, with its tender aspect, reassured her.

"I can't *see* any teef," she said, peering closely. "An' He's got wings. Does He fly down wiv my tea, like the birds take crumbs to their chickies?"

Presently, her heart surrendering to the benign presentment, and her conscience maybe chiding her for misconceptions, she gently stroked the pictured brows with frail small hand.

"Fank you, God, for my nice tea!" she whispered softly. "Don't hide any more in the corners wen it's dark, acause it fyightens Elfie."

Then with the quick-sand impressions of childhood, she passed on eagerly to something else.

"Little Boy," she said. "I'm Mrs. Brown. Shall I take you to ve sea-side?"

They bought tickets at the fender as before, and traveled by the hearthrug. Again, her little strenuous hand in his, she set him on a golden strand of her imagination and dragged him back in hair's-breadth rescues from breakers thundering in upon the nursery oil-cloth.

And again, as previously, she was precipitated out of fairyland by the sudden reappearance of her nurse, whose mantling blushes and self-conscious smiles, the aftermath no doubt of dallyings with Fritz upon the stairs, were turned to stone and rigorous self-righteousness at sight of her charge's dereliction.

Catching her violently by an arm, she jerked her away from her friend.

"Oh, you are a naughty, disobedient little gell, Miss Elfie!" she called shrilly. "After all I told you about stopping in your nursery just while I went down for a piece of antiseptic soap to bathe you. You don't seem to have any conscience at all, and after being so naughty at tea, and not saying your grace. I shall run away and leave you—that's what I shall do, and then there won't be any Nannie to give you your breakfast and take you for walks. And then what will you do?"

By this time, the child was sobbing breathlessly.

She clung desperately to the hard red hand.

"No, don't go, Nannie. Don't go an' leave me all alone. You shan't go. . . . I don't want you to go. . . . I want my supper. . . . I want to go for walks—I want. . . ."

Her sobs choked further utterance.

"Well, I shall go, if you make another sound. So stop crying this very, very minute."

The appalling prospect of being abandoned to her own helpless resources, reinforced the poor little creature's powers. In order to obey the impossible behest of stifling sound on a crescendo of sobs, she clenched her fists, and

clutching her pinafore, crammed her mouth full with it, her streaming eyes fixed apprehensively upon her torturer in dread of seeing her stalk off, leaving her a hapless castaway upon the desert island of her nursery.

Her little body heaved now almost soundlessly, but painfully, as her distorted features showed.

"What made you take to being a children's nurse?" Malet asked the woman, as disagreeably as he knew how. He fixed a cold, insulting stare upon her. He would have liked to wring her crude, inhuman neck.

She showed discomfited beneath the stare and tones. Then she bridled and retorted.

"Why, because I'm fond of children, and always have been, as every one who knows will tell you. But children must be taught obedience."

He laughed in her face, a cutting, scarifying laugh, designed to flay her.

"Fond of children! Good Lord!" he cried. "Why, you don't understand them better than a cart-horse might."

She stood furious but disconcerted before his censure. Then rallying:

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, sir. I've never been so insulted in my life. I shall speak to Mrs. Corry the instant I've put Miss Elsie to bed. If I don't understand children I ought to, when I was one of eleven myself, and have had a year's training in an institution. I won't stop anywhere to be so spoken to."

The mild man when roused is capable of fury.

"I don't care what you've done or where you were trained," he told her. "You're no more fitted for a children's nurse than a cart-horse, and the sooner you take to being a prison-wardress the better for everybody, I should say."

The bully, whether of children or of less defenceless persons, is generally a coward.

She muttered and fumed, her eyes dropped in her

crimson face. Then she turned and flounced from the room, dragging the unhappy child after her. At the door, Elfie wrenched herself away, however, and running back to Malet, stood holding up her little arms. He bent to her. She flung them round his neck and gave him a passionate hug, the grip of which surprised him by its intensity.

Young as she was, it bespoke a comradeship of souls. For they who have trod together the paths of the imagination are indissolubly linked by the strongest and strangest of ties.

Law and custom forbidding him to throw the little creature's torturer out of the nursery window, he let off his fume and distress as best he might, stalking up and down the room and cursing softly.

His gift of penetration, enabling him to read the child-mind, told him what this sensitive, fanciful child must suffer at the hands of her fresh-complexioned, soulless tyrant.

It was a common enough case, he knew, to his profound regret. He had sat in London parks, and had seen the high-strung, sensitive natures of the children of the cultured racked and harassed by the narrow-hearted, vulgar tyranny of women of crude temperament, often harsh and soured by life, sometimes cruel and immoral, to whose care mothers handed over their little ones, body and soul. It had always seemed to him that no nature could be too fine, no power or faculties too high or complex, for a function so important, an art so delicate, a task so beautiful and sacred, as that of ministering to and shaping the rainbow-tinted, exquisite innocence of childhood. *For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Beyond all things he knew there were needed for this task the gifts of sympathy and imagination. So only could there be due understanding of the difficult, delicate charge.

In the garden of the imagination, the child-mind and

the mind mature are able to meet and to play together. For the imagination, being the borderland where soul and body merge, is eternally young. And in this garden Elfie had found in the man of intellect the Little Boy her lonely heart desired for playmate.

Unfortunately, in all fairy-stories there is some or another sort of ogre, and the ogre in this child's fairy-story, as in many other children's, was her nurse. Yet by no means always *malice prepense*, but merely natural disqualification for a task too delicate and complex for her crude and possibly soured nature, converts the nursemaid into an ogre.

With his fondness for children, Malet had not lived so long without learning that to champion the cause of any one of them, is seldom to earn its mother's gratitude. On the contrary, to do so far more frequently excites her hot resentment. For she may readily take it as a reflection upon her discharge of her maternal obligations.

Accordingly, he was wary not to speak his mind openly to Carry regarding Elfie's tyrant. Tactful and guarded as he was, however, she perceived the trend of his suggestions.

She was on the defensive at once, and lost no opportunity thereafter of boasting the virtues and blowing the trumpet of her deputy. He was given to understand that never before in all the history of nursemaids had there been one more capable and unremitting in her duties. She was a treasure not to be lost for untold gold; was trained in all the latest and most scientific codes of nursermaiding; and so forth.

Further, it was made clear to him that the paragon had, as she had threatened, entered a complaint against him. For Carry wound up:

"So please be careful not to offend her. I could not possibly replace her. If you do not mind, it would really be better for you not to let Elfie come to you,

and for you not to go to her nursery at all. She gets out of hand at once."

"My dear Carry," he returned imperturbably, "if you suppose I shall live in a house with a child and ignore her, or that I shall go out of my way to be civil to her nurse, you do not know me. So long as little Elfie likes to come to me, I'm afraid I shall do nothing but encourage her; and when I see her nurse unkind to her, she may thank her lucky stars if I don't punch her head. So put that in your pipe, my dear, and smoke it, or—bundle me out of the house!"

He turned a whimsical but steadfast gaze upon her. She was a little nettle who required to be grasped with firmness!

The firm hand served.

In the place of stinging, she surrendered. She laughed meekly.

"Bundle you out of the house!" she protested. "Why, what an extraordinary thing to say!"

"It would be more extraordinary to do," he returned, laughing. "Seeing that I am very comfortable here, and hope you do not find me in your way."

"Oh, not at all, of course." She added with a sudden girlish candor, smiling her dry little smile:

"I didn't like it at first, though. Peter and I were so happy as we were."

Her mouth twisted more resentfully than pathetically, but with a reminiscent softening of her eyes.

People who take their sorrows hard and in an ugly way, are really more to be pitied than are they who take them well. For added to the burden of their sorrows is the burden of the ugly feelings they further heap upon them.

The relations between Peter and Carry had remained at cross-purposes, although less noisily and aggressively



so than they had shown on that first afternoon of Malet's return.

There was nothing subtle or diplomatic about Peter. He did not conceal, was incapable perhaps of concealing, the change that had taken place in his affection for her. He was curt with her, careless of hurting her; would sit humming to himself and drumming abstractedly with a hand upon an arm of his chair, while his abstracted gaze proclaimed the wandering of his thoughts.

Malet would have known, even if the narrow angry looks she cast at him had not betrayed the fact, that her jealousy made her see one bourne only for Peter's thoughts. He knew that in the nature of things, Peter was frequently pondering topics other than that of Mrs. Ferrers. But he knew too that Carry would never give him credit for considering others.

These strained relations between husband and wife had, as so frequently happens, altered the relation of both to Malet.

When they quarrelled openly and wished to punish one another by disdaining to address remarks directly to that other, they addressed them to him. When they wished further to hurt one another, they made scathing comments on humanity in general, trusting to the other to fit the damning cap upon him or herself.

When, having quarrelled, they desired a reconciliation, they smiled and talked pleasantly to the *tertium quid* with sudden little searchings for the other's eyes and softening intonations for the other's ears.

Malet, accordingly, found himself made much of, found himself even the target of small coquetries and flatteries by which Carry thought to provoke or to melt admiration from Corry. Knowing her reasons, he did an amiable part in aiding her, responding warmly to her wiles. For the life of him, he had no patience with Peter, big stupid fellow that he was to waste the affection to his

hand and available, in order to pursue the elusive Ferrers shadow.

Under her carking care of jealousy, Carry grew thinner and harder and colder than ever. Those primal elements in her came more strongly into relief. At times there was something notably evil and sinister about her.

Malet was aware that the science of life is not to make drafts too deep upon the powers, as by doing this the lower strata of character, those which have been submerged by evolutionary development, emerge again. Basic muddy deeps are best not stirred at all, it being far more helpful and improving to keep powers and impulses setting, and thereby strengthening, in the upper reaches. The best developmental conditions are those which exercise our strengths, but do not put too great a strain upon our weaknesses.

Accordingly, he deplored on her account the strain which jealousy was putting on a character with jagged rocks and treacherous shallows only just below the surface.

He saw that her fondness for Peter was mainly sensual, and was not love in any of the higher or romantic meanings of the word; but it was the only love of which she was capable, and such as it was it warmed and softened her, making her tense, cold nature kindlier and more tolerant. Without its mellowing influence, not only would she be chill and hard and self-centered to a degree, but she might even be actively evil.

That Carry had reason for jealousy Malet could not but admit. Peter had changed appreciably, being too simple or too honest in his ways to practice any of the customary wiles by means of which, if husbands do not succeed in well deceiving their wives as to their diminished sentiment, they blunt at all events the sharper edges of the truth.

The boyish and whole-hearted pride in her cleverness and the glorification of such charm as she possessed,

which had previously characterized him, were now conspicuously missing. Then, all that she had been, had said and done, had aroused his interest and evoked his praise. Now, all she was and said and did, left him tepid and unstirred. Where before he had turned kindling eyes upon her, now he saw her with abstracted gaze.

And womanlike, where before she had taken his praise and admiration indifferently, often had met them with repulse, now that they were withheld she made strenuous though fruitless efforts to regain them.

For he had become singularly apathetic concerning her. Their young philanderings, their maneuvers to be left alone together in one another's all-sufficing company, which had made Malet feel himself intruder, came to an end. Now, they encouraged him to join them in order to preserve them from constrained interviews.

Poor Carry did all in her power to rekindle her husband's affection. She redoubled her domestic assiduities. She rode to death her hobby of rearranging the table and the other appointments of the house. She ordered charming little meals to please him, and strove in every way to subjugate him by her arts of home-making. She paid more attention to her clothes, to the dressing of her hair, and to other personal enhancements.

Vainly, however. The fickle man seemed to have gone blind to her arts and attractions, even showed impatience of her domestic assiduities, complaining that she fussed unnecessarily over trifles. And his dull eye ceased to appraise, his silent tongue to praise her toques or hair-dressings.

Lacking his praise and approving eyes, her weapons of coquetry missed fire. A woman can no more be charming in the company of masculine inappreciation than can an actor be nobly dramatic before an indifferent audience.

Feeling herself grown plain and ineffective in his

sight, she grew, actually, plain and ineffective. Such attractiveness as she possessed had been in a certain snap and sparkle with which she had spiced her plainness, as clever cooks will make an appetizing dish of something savorless by addition of a *sauce piquante*.

The sparkle and snap gone out of her, she was almost ugly. Her flattened brows and deep-set, glittering eyes, set at an unusual angle in her head, showed no longer quaint and characteristic, but were frankly unpleasing. Even her undulant movements and the dart of her small head upon her supple neck now lost their grace, and lapsed into a nervous eccentricity.

Her temper, always sharp and irritable, grew sour and rasping. She became a living exemplification of the saying "Unkist, unkind!" now that Peter's disaffection left the sex-element in her, the one vitalizing, mollifying factor of her, unstimulated and unfed.

A phase of old-maidishness, chill and sterile, bitter and austere, set in.

Malet, expert in temperamental diseases as he was, was very good to her at this juncture. He reflected whimsically that his sojourn at "Roseberry" had brought him two patients suffering from the distressing, albeit common enough, malady of conjugal neglect. Lady Lygon, thanks to his counsel and to her own sound nature, was on the road to convalescence, however. Of a finely balanced and a naturally sweet disposition, she had rallied now against the mind-poison, and no longer allowed her thwarted emotions to warp impulse and action, although it was inevitable that they should injuriously affect her.

For the ptomaines of thwarted emotions are at least as harmful to the human organism as are the ptomaines of arrested digestion.

But Carry's was a different case from Lady Lygon's. There were in her evil spots where such poisons might breed and canker her whole being.

Malet, perceiving this danger for her, gave her such

help as he could, out of his kind heart arranging little pleasures for her, drives, visits to local entertainments, bazaars, Chrysanthemum Shows, and the small theater. Even he went so far in playing Good Samaritan as to buy tickets for her and Peter for a series of subscription dances, and when Peter could not or would not accompany her, did so himself at a cost of unspeakable boredom.

He read to her, and though she listened mostly with a hard and unmoved face, her nimble fingers quick upon some work, at rare intervals he reaped the reward of the physician in seeing his potion operate, watching her eyes grow round and young and interested again.

Sometimes she so far softened as to drop a tear. He knew that, if one could have analyzed the psycho-chemical constitution of such tears, they would have been found to be surcharged with bitterness and venom, for having shed which her nature must have been the better.

Strangely enough, the two having nothing in common and being able to blend only by virtue of the warm and solvent power of his sympathy, she came to find solace and support in him, even to seek his company and counsel. Never on the matter nearest to her heart, however. Of this she did not speak, but hid the poison deep in her secretive nature, letting it fester there.

Peter, too, showed somewhat in need of a physician. But Malet felt no disposition to enact the part to him. He was a man—let him bear his own burdens, and by doing so salutarily stiffen his backbone! Moreover, he had no patience with good, honest barnyard geese aspiring to eyries. It was monstrous for Nephew Peter to be sighing out his heart for this Moon of women! He himself had sighed, feeling her all-potent sway. Yet knowing his sphere as far removed from hers as were the poles, he had laid his sigh as a tribute on her altar, and had gone his way—to sigh no more.

He saw that Peter, although he seemed to suffer, was

nevertheless benefiting by his moon-struck phase. By hook or by crook, men in their pilgrimage through life must learn to look up. Peter, good, easy fellow that he was, had never looked up; lacked aspirations, vigors, and ideals. He had taken life as it were from a too easy arm-chair, making no efforts, spurred by no salutary discontents of mind or soul, but good-humored and careless, tooling his tame and self-indulgent course along the smoothest roads available.

Some growing pains of mind and soul were indispensable to his development, since all development was won by stress.

He showed signs of improvement already. For the first time in his life he began to take it seriously, to show dissatisfaction with himself, to mend his methods. He rose earlier, looked more to his duties, left these and his responsibilities less to Carry, and in the place of lazily watching the clock for the hour of retirement, now sat late into the night, reading and even doing a little thinking on his own account.

Whether all this were done to the prick of higher impulse, or whether only as a means of escape from the fret and fever of infatuation, Malet could not determine. He merely saw new aspiration and endeavor in him.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A CHILD-SCAPEGOAT

**I**T was an axiom of Malet's that whensoever you see a man or woman hard pressed or maltreated by some other, you may safely look for a third who is hard pressing the maltreater—or for circumstances that are doing this. The persons who are unkind from inherent cruelty are few, albeit they who are unkind to their fellows because life is unkind to them are numerous enough.

In her cold, tense way, Carry was attached to Elfie. But like many young mothers when they do not err upon the side of laxity, she erred in being far too strict a disciplinarian with her. The child was wound up punctually at stated intervals, and was expected to live and to move and to act as though she had been a piece of rigid clockwork, in the place of being, as she was, a plastic, complex, highly impressionable tangle of nerves and quicksilver sensibilities, of impulses and fancies.

If her nurse appeared to take her to bed at a moment of high joy in play, she was expected to shut down in that moment upon her flood-tide of spirits, and without an instant of grace in which to readjust her powers, to say her "Good-nights" as unfailingly and instantaneously as a clock strikes the hour when the passage of time and the movement of a lever make it impossible for it to do anything else.

All such summary and rigid rule is bad, of course, for children, the instantaneous checking and turning back upon themselves of swiftly setting forces acting in the

manner of a nervous shock. Minutes of grace, in time and in all things, should be accorded to them, since not only are they not clockwork, but every effort should be made so to foster their spontaneity and sensibility as to preserve them from degenerating into anything so unchildlike and inhuman.

Children serve as scapegoats for the sins and sufferings of those in authority over them.

And poor Elfie, who, as Malet knew, suffered sufficiently for Fritz's shortcomings with regard to her nurse, and for other of her nurse's irritations, was presently made to suffer yet more grievously because the powers had made of Mrs. Ferrers such a paragon of cleverness and charm that the image of her ran amuck in Peter's brain, and by doing this wrecked Carry's temper.

It began one afternoon when Peter had been showing more than ordinarily moon-struck, and more than ordinarily curt and sharp with Carry. Finally he had said briefly, and with marked embarrassment, that he must run up to town the following morning, and would not be back until late.

Carry having been always in his confidence, it had been his habit to explain his infrequent absences from home, while genuinely deploring them. And Carry looked up now, with a quick eye, to learn the explanation of this projected journey.

He avoided the eye, drumming nervously on an arm of his chair.

Then, "Where are you going?" she demanded point-blank.

"Oh, nowhere in particular," he answered. "A professional engagement."

At once she showed signs of suspicion.

"If you are wanted, where shall I wire to you, or telephone?"

She fixed him with a penetrating gaze.



"Oh, I shan't be wanted."

"But if you are?"

He spent some moments in deliberation.

Then he said:

"Send to me at the Carlton. I shall lunch there."

She made a little darting movement of the head, and a slight sound as though about to speak.

She checked herself, however, and Malet saw her eyes fix strangely.

Peter suddenly raising his to look at her, dropped them again and fidgeted.

He rose.

"I'll write some letters," he said, "as I shall be away all day to-morrow."

He went out with a self-conscious stalk, his sturdy back and legs seeming to stiffen beneath the Medusa gaze pursuing them.

She sat without speech or movement for an interval, her hands clasped in her lap, her fingers gliding in and out of one another with a smooth rigidity. Malet thought upon a nest of little coiling snakes.

"Here is an interesting passage," he said, taking up a book he had laid down earlier. "Shall I read it to you?"

"If you like," she answered indifferently—rudely.

He did not allow himself to be offended.

She paid him no attention while he read. And when he had finished, she made no comment, but sat there cold and rigid, save for the twisting of her fingers.

A diversion was caused by Elfie, who ran in from the garden, where she had been playing.

She was fond of her mother, and dancing over to her held up her arms. When Carry stooped, she gave her an affectionate hug.

"Mumsey," she begged, "come and play bears. How

can I play bears all alone when there isn't any one to eat?"

Carry, ever full of duties and activities, found but little time to play with her child. Such leisure as she had she spent in hard exercise, in walking or upon a local golf-course, thus making herself harder and more spent and spare than she was naturally.

"No, I can't come," she said now, shortly. "Play at something else. I am busy."

"What are you doing?" Elfie demanded, elfishly glancing down at the maternal idle hands.

"I am just going to do something—to turn out the linen-chest."

Elfie accepted the excuse. When her mother was "turning out" places, she was usually the first to undergo the process.

She skipped across to Malet.

The little wistful, elfin face was thrust between him and his book.

"Little Boy," she appealed, screwing up her features into a whimsical, seductive grimace. "Come in the garden and play. I'm Mrs. Brown, and I've come——"

The remainder was lost.

Carry said authoritatively:

"You must give up calling yourself Mrs. Brown, Elfie. I won't have it any more. You are not Mrs. Brown, as you know quite well. You are Elfrida Margaret Corry. It is silly—besides, it's a story—to say you are Mrs. Brown. Who is Mrs. Brown?"

"I am," Elfie returned promptly, with conviction.

"There it is again. You've got quite into a habit. But I tell you, you must never say it again, or I shall have to be very, very angry with you."

Elfie's little face set. She looked fixedly before her. Then she said obstinately:

"But I am Mrs. Brown. I've always been." She

called Malet to witness. "Didn't I take you to ve sea-side, Little Boy, wen I was Mrs. Brown?"

Malet could not deny it.

Whereupon Elfie turned back in triumph to her mother.

"'Little Boy' says I am Mrs. Brown, mumsey."

"Now, you are nearly as naughty. You must say 'Uncle.' You are getting a big girl, and it's silly and like a baby to call people out of their names. Besides, it is very rude."

"I don't mind," Malet interposed sturdily, seeing a scared look steal into the child's face at the threat of being deprived of a talisman that put magic into life. "It makes it easier for her to play with me, when she has taken half a century off my age by calling me 'Little Boy.'"

In her eager fashion the child thrust out a little frail hand toward him, without touching him, but with the mute effect of one clutching at a friendly straw. She knew her mother's implacable rule of obedience, and glimpsed herself in danger of being shorn by it of glory.

Carry looked obstinate. She yielded one point, however, only to center her forces the more obdurately in the other.

"Oh, well, if you don't mind, she can call you 'Little Boy' if she likes. Although it's very silly of her, when she knows your name quite well. But she shall not call herself 'Mrs. Brown.' I'm determined about that. It is stupid and vulgar. I can't think how she picked up such a common notion."

The joy and spontaneity were suddenly stripped from the child, as though they had been shining robes. She stood bereft and motionless, her face upturned to the cold arbitress of her life, a frail little solemn figure turned to stone.

Then, "I *am* Mrs. Brown," she insisted, in a faint voice, with a quiver in it. She clenched her hands as

though, aware of the inadequacy of the voice and of the plea, she were holding on with these frail members to child-faiths in danger of being wrested from her.

Now Carry, bearing down upon her, knelt in front of her in such a way as to bring her eyes and the determination in them level with the recreant, and thus the more effectually to cow her. She set two rigid hands upon the fragile shoulders and spoke in a voice of cold authority, a voice greatly too hard and too cold in which to speak to a child:

"Elfie, do you hear me? Do you hear what Mother says? You are not 'Mrs. Brown,' and it's nothing but silly nonsense to call yourself so. Your name is Elfrida Margaret Corry. And you are never, *never* again to call yourself that horrid woman, or to speak of her. You hear me. Never, *never* again."

The poor little creature remained for some moments standing in her stony obstinacy and despair, staring her baby-resolutions into her mother's implacable eyes. Then she succumbed. As Malet saw it, like a little unfledged bird, plucked of its golden down by cruel hands, she turned and ran a little way, then dropped upon the floor and lay there without moving. Soon her small body began to be shaken by hard dry sobs.

She called out with passionate intensity:

"I will, I will, I will . . . I won't, I won't . . . I won't be . . . Elfrida Marg . . . ar . . . et Cor . . . ry. I will be . . . will be . . . *will* be . . . Mrs. Br . . . rown."

Carry could do nothing with her, when presently, having left her to sob and protest for a while, she picked her up. She let herself fall limp and flaccid, hanging, a dead and sobbing weight, upon her mother's hands. She would not sit, nor stand, but only gravitated, a limp mass, toward the floor.

Further, she kicked and bit, and to Malet's and her mother's astonishment—for she had never previously behaved so—losing all her pretty charm and winsome-

ness, she grovelled on the carpet, shrieking like a little animal. It was as though, Malet reflected, shorn of an illusion which by some queer working of her child-mind had winged and glorified existence for her, she dropped now into depths of heathen abasement, reverting to brutish primeval ways.

Neither he nor Carry could do anything to pacify her. Finally her nurse was summoned.

She came with a face of triumph. There was a perpetual conflict between her and Carry as to which had the more influence with and better managed the child. And this recourse to her was an open avowal of failure upon Carry's part.

"What in the world has happened?" she demanded, in tones which, allied with her condemnatory eye, implied that whatsoever had happened would not have happened under her administration.

"Why, nothing at all, Nurse," Carry answered, rather lamely. "She must require a powder, or she would never behave so shockingly. I just told her she was never again to call herself 'Mrs. Brown,' and she goes on like this. I will not have her call herself 'Mrs. Brown.' It's a stupid, vulgar habit, and she must be broken of it. Of that I am determined."

"Well, I didn't teach it to her; but I don't know how I'm going to get her to take her meals without it," the nurse said in a resistant voice. "She has scarcely any appetite, and often the only way I can get her to eat at all is by saying, 'Poor Mrs. Brown is hungry and must have some pudding.' She'll feed 'Mrs. Brown,' when she won't feed herself."

"I know," Carry rejoined sharply. "Her last nurse taught her this foolishness. It was when she was ill. There was some reason for it then, because she would simply have died of starvation if she hadn't thought that she was feeding 'Mrs. Brown' when she ate her food. But she is quite well now, and she must be broken of

the habit once for all. I have said it, and she must obey."

The nurse gave a covert toss of her head to express her distaste for the too authoritative tone. Then she caught up the swollen, inert mass, with crimson sodden cheeks and streaming eyes, to which anger and disillusion had reduced the little fairy creature, and bore her off in capable hard arms.

Malet had witnessed all this with a compunctious heart. Where Carry—possessing no imagination—saw nothing beyond a silly baby-trick in the "Mrs. Brown" business, he knew it for an illusion that put grace and color into the poor little creature's life. "Mrs. Brown" was to her no empty name typifying a middle-class British matron, but was a transcendental personage, a gracious myth, a spell to conjure by, a talisman with power to transfigure her own small person and her nursery-world to enchanted dimensions.

The words "I'm Mrs. Brown!" were an Open Sesame to a treasure-house of potency and fancy, and straight-way, being said, she felt herself endued with glory, having stars about her head and rainbows at her feet. Being said, her whole expression changed. For the gracious investment empowered her to lavish gifts, to transmute pebbles from the road to emeralds and rubies, to confer favors, setting otherwise unprivileged Little Boys upon a golden strand of nursery oilcloth to disport thereon in cresting breakers.

His soft heart swelled in anticipation of the pain and deprivation this poor babe must suffer before these stupid women would finally succeed in toppling her mind-castles.

"Heavens, Carry!" he was spurred from his habit of discretion to protest, as her unhappy victim was snatched away, sobbing, "what harm is there in the child calling herself 'Mrs. Brown' or Mrs. anything else, if it pleases her? Don't you see that it means a great deal to her,

that it makes her feel happy and important, and gives her endless pleasure and amusement?"

"It is nothing but silliness," she insisted in an unrelenting voice. "I am determined to break her of it. It's just the same thing as Mr. Thackeray thinking he is the great Mr. Thackeray."

"Not a bit of it. Elfie is a clever little child, and she knows perfectly well that she is Elfie, and that 'Mrs. Brown' is only a play-character."

"Well, I won't have it. It's untrue as well as silly. It will make her untruthful to be always saying she's somebody she isn't. You know," she added with a dry smile, for they were now quite excellent friends,—“you know a man without children of his own can't really know anything about training children. Nurse and I have a system, and it jumbles it when anybody interferes. Already Nurse says you have upset Elfie's religious beliefs, which we took such pains to drill into her. We have always told her nobody can see God or knows what He is like, as of course nobody can—possibly. And now you have shown her some picture you told her was God—or like Him. Wasn't it a little sacrilegious, don't you think?"

Malet, too much concerned at the moment to be able to laugh at the notion of Elfie's "religious beliefs," explained.

"The child was frightened. A baby of that age can't understand a being who is in the room and yet cannot be seen. She imagined an ogre. As you know, Carry, it is not my habit to interfere, but I do beg of you to wean the child gradually, if she must be weaned, of playing at being 'Mrs. Brown.' Do not break her of it all at once."

Carry set her lips and shook her head, and went off without further ado to turn out her linen-chest.

And upstairs in her nursery, under her gaoler's hard looks and ignoring her threats, a sullen, exhausted child sat heavily beside a table, spiritless and broken. Before

her were a bowl of bread and milk and a baked apple—untouched because they were joys forbidden to the palate, foods denied to the glorious existence of the great “Mrs. B.”

“She hasn’t eaten a crumb or drunk a drop of her milk,” Malet heard the nurse inform Carry triumphantly that evening on the stairs. “Her temperature was nearly a hundred and one when I put her to bed. We shall have her ill if she keeps this up much longer.”

“Oh, she will soon forget,” Carry said, responding to the nurse’s unconcealed triumph with affected carelessness. But Malet heard uneasiness in her voice; for she knew that the child possessed something of her own unyielding will.

To Malet, reading in his room the following day, there stole a wan and drab-faced child on limbs of which it seemed the springs were broken. She looked behind her with a scared expression—for threats dog the footsteps of imaginative children as werewolves might—then closing the door soundlessly she tip-toed up to him.

She lifted her poor face, and whispered in a little threadlike voice:

“I *am* Mrs. Brown, Little Boy.”

It went to his heart to see the trepidation in the eyes she fastened on him, as though beseeching that he too would not deny her. He stooped and took her in his arms, and his silence seeming to affirm her claim, she drew a deep sigh of relief, and dropped her head upon his breast.

She fell into an exhausted sleep. To preserve her from a scolding, he carried her, still sleeping, to the nursery and laid her on her bed.

Carry’s uneasiness during the day, together with the whispered colloquies he overheard between her and the nurse in the corridor outside his room, told him that the child was now launched upon the storm.



"I didn't dare to take her out on such a little food as she has had all day," the nurse said. "She's as limp as a kitten. She just took a few bites of bread-and-butter and drank a sip of milk. But when her appetite falls off, she won't eat unless she thinks it's 'Mrs. Brown' who's eating."

"Oh, well, we must be firm. She will have forgotten all about it and will be hungry again to-morrow, you'll find."

"Do you think the doctor ought to see her?"

"Of course not!" (sharply). "Why should he see her? She isn't ill."

"Well, she can't keep well on the food a mouse would eat. I wish you had left breaking her of 'Mrs. Brown' to me."

"Nonsense, Nurse! As though I don't know how to manage my own child. She ought never to have been taught such a foolish trick!"

A fanciful child with the wings of its imagination clipped goes like a broken-winged bird. Malet ground his teeth and cursed behind them, seeing this one striving to adjust her little life to the dead level to which her wingless state now doomed her. At times she wore a dazed, half-frightened look, as though she had lost herself on the dun plane to which she was condemned.

Then, childlike, forgetting her restrictions, she played again, and laughed and tripped.

Children are so sensitive, however, and react so vitally to their conditions and impressions that the effect upon her of the prohibition was grievous. Malet had known that she would suffer, but he had not calculated the degree. In the space of days she seemed to dwindle to a little shadow; drab-faced, deep-eyed, creeping on gossamer feet.

And ever that duet went on outside his door, the duet of the nurse's triumph and the mother's unrelenting.

"She simply hadn't the strength to walk to-day. When

I took her out of her pram, she just ran a little way, and then came back and whimpered to be put in again."

"Oh" (lightly), "she'll soon pick up again when once she begins to eat. Children must be trained. And she hasn't mentioned 'Mrs. Brown' for two whole days."

"She was awake till nearly three o'clock. I didn't close my eyes, she tossed and fretted so. I had to get up twice and slap her before she would be quiet. And then she woke again at five. I've got a racking headache."

"Give her some of her bromide mixture to-night. And I'll order a sweet-bread for her dinner. She loves sweet-breads."

Thus these competitors in child-exploitation!

It appeared, however, that it was not Elfie but it had been "Mrs. Brown" who loved sweet-bread. For the nurse was able in her voice of cold triumph to report by evening that Elfie had stoutly resisted the bait, and had eaten nothing for her dinner but a chocolate cake.

"I had to tempt her to eat somehow," she said. "And she couldn't refuse that."

"Well, we must continue to be firm," said Carry. And Malet, listening, felt an unregenerate craving to knock their two unsympathetic heads together.

Finally, growing alarmed by the child's appearance, he set Peter on their track. Peter had told him soon after his arrival that although he frequently disapproved their ways with Elfie, these being too rigid and repressive, he but seldom interfered.

"Mothers and nurses think they know everything about bringing up children," he had said with a shrug of the shoulders; "and if you want peace in a house, you've got to let them have their way."

Now, however, since peace was no longer betwixt Carry and him, Malet reflected that in Elfie's interests their war might be to some purpose. Accordingly he directed his attention to the child's altered looks.

"Isn't she rather pale? Do you think perhaps she's sickening for whooping-cough or something?" he suggested—wily old fox that he was!

Now Peter had of late been too much engrossed by his own sentiments to have eyes for the child, or he must have remarked the change in her. Since his journey to London about which he had been so mysterious, he had shown more than ever moon-struck.

And here it may be admitted that, to Malet's stupefaction, Peter had confessed to him, or rather had, with fatuous pride and a request for secrecy, pressed upon him the astounding confidence that this visit had been to meet and to lunch with Mrs. Ferrers at that lady's invitation. More, he said mysteriously, he was not at liberty to divulge. But in his hair, as he said it, were the straws of frenzy.

Malet, amazed, mystified, and, to tell the whole truth, with envy gnawing at his bones, had first indulged in caustic comments upon moths and lamps, and had then gravely counseled him to throw down his oars and get out of that galley. Envy it was, no doubt, which made so careful a litterateur so bungle his metaphors. At the same time, the lady lost some volts of luster in his eyes when he found her employing her brilliancy in singeing the wings of so common and everyday a moth as Nephew Peter!

Mindful, however, of strange and yet passing strange workings he had witnessed of that great law of Natural Selection, designated Love, the law by which Nature levels up and levels down her human family to normal averages, he saw it not impossible that the peerless Ferrers, with the high world of men at her feet, should stoop to Peter.

To return to Elfie, however. Peter, warned by Malet, answered rather guiltily that there could be nothing wrong with the child, or it would have been reported to

him. But that afternoon, when she was brought in to pay her brief customary visit to her parents on returning from her walk, Malet saw that his eyes were waiting for her the moment the nurse's step and voice became audible outside.

Then, "Come to Daddy, Elfie," he bade her, on seeing her leaden face and languid gait. And from his voice Malet knew that he had taken alarm.

She crept to him with a wan smile.

"Up!" he said, and held his knee for her.

She did not, as was her wont, however, clamber for place with joy and frolic. She made a weak attempt, then fell back heavily against him. With a face suddenly serious, he took her up. She let her head drop on his chest, and closed her eyes.

"Why didn't you tell me the child was ill?" he rebuked the nurse sharply.

"Oh, she isn't ill," the nurse said briskly. She was one of the persons who regard themselves as so bristling with knowledge and experience as to be able to dispense with graces; "she's only a bit off her food."

"There must be some reason. How long has she been like this?"

Two women who are sworn combatants will frequently enter upon a truce with one another in order to join forces against a man—more particularly when that man threatens to intrude on a domain they regard as essentially theirs.

"Oh, she'll pick up again in a day or two," Nannie said now, with an understanding glance at her confederate. "She never has much appetite. Come along, Elfie, and have your tea."

The child showed no sign of hearing, her leaden face against her father's breast. He drew her closer.

"Answer my question, Nurse," he insisted firmly. "How long has this been going on, and how did it begin?"

Now the nurse looked at Carry with a gesture which shelved the onus of explanation and responsibility.

Carry explained.

"But why, in Heaven's name," he protested, as Malet had done, "shouldn't the child call herself 'Mrs. Brown,' or Jones or Robinson or anything she likes, if she likes?"

Carry gave reasons.

"Stuff and nonsense!" Peter dismissed them bluntly. "You're far too strict with her, and try too many fads and methods with her, instead of letting her grow up naturally. I've told you so before. Children must play. Play is as necessary as food is to them. And they must be allowed to play in their own way. You'll just ruin her brain and her health and her temper with all this over-training. Nurse, do you hear—you're to let her call herself anything she likes. We shall have her downright ill if this goes on. No, it's no use talking, Carry, I'm running this thing now. I've stood too much already, and I won't have the child made ill. Elfie, dear—I say, Elfie, are you 'Mrs. Brown'?"

There was a quivering lip and a dejected head-shake.

"Mummy says I mustn't ever be again," she answered drearily, half opening her eyes.

"Oh, well, Mummy made a mistake. You're going to be 'Mrs. Brown' again. So go up with Nurse, and give 'Mrs. Brown' a ripping good tea."

Another quiver of the lip; another head-shake.

"She's gone away. I can't find her any more." She added with distaste: "I don't want my tea. I want to stay wiv Daddy."

"Well, you shall then, and have your tea here. You shall have a nice big egg-oh. Won't that be fine?"

Elfie shook her head upon the "egg-oh." She looked sick.

Instructions were given for the child's tea, and a boiled egg to be sent to the drawing-room.

"And no more nonsense about 'Mrs. Brown,'" he insisted stoutly. "She shall call herself what she likes."

"Well, it's none of my doing," the nurse said truculently, as she went.

Soon Elfie opened her eyes, color flowed back to her cheeks. She sat up with her accustomed animation. She clapped her hands, and slipped down from her father's knee.

"Daddy," she cried excitedly, "I can hear an aeroplane flyin' over the nurs'ry. I want to go up and look at it. I must go up and look at the aeroplane flyin' wiv a man in it."

"You see there isn't much wrong with her," Carry said acidly, as the child capered to the door. "And you have been talking as though I were killing her. I had better take her upstairs and let her have her tea quietly."

"All right," Peter said, rather crestfallen, the child's return of zest and energy making it seem that he had been unjustifiably severe. "Only don't worry her any more about 'Mrs. Brown.' I insist on that."

He explained to Malet that Elfie had once seen an aeroplane, and was now lying always in wait for others.

After this assertion of authority, to which the strained relations between him and Carry had emboldened him, their relations became yet more strained. She made tea in silence, sitting with a cold and injured look upon her face.

Half way through dinner that evening the nurse appeared suddenly, with a frightened face.

"Will you come at once to Miss Elfie, sir," she appealed to Corry. "I don't like the look of her at all."

Peter, for all his accustomed dilatoriness, was at the door before she had finished.

Carry, too, half started up, but stiffening her lip, sat down again. Malet saw that by sheer force of muscle she compelled herself to sit and to show composed.

Lady Sarah was dining in her room, but Mr. Thackeray was present, and was greatly ruffled by the interruption. He had been holding forth to Carry about the incomparable one. After going scrupulously through his *Vanity Fair's* with a red-inked pen, suspended like a stake of ostracism, for the banning of those "Becky's" that had detracted from Rebecca's consequence, he was now going through it to obliterate "Sharp's" and to substitute the surname "Valmont." "Rebecca Valmont" was a great improvement upon Becky Sharp, and would doubtless reinstate the incomparable one in public opinion. Moreover, having a French savor, he considered that it substantiated her claim to kinship with the Montmorencys.

He resented it always as a personal affront when interrupted in his moments of eloquence. He sat looking at the door for Peter's return, in order that he might continue his remarks.

Peter showed no sign of returning, however. Malet, seeing Carry's face grow pinched and white as her anxieties battled with her will, said presently:

"If you would like to run up to Elfie, Carry, I can keep Mr. Thackeray company, you know."

She turned upon him sharply.

"Why should I go? The child is all right. Peter should not interfere."

She sat on obstinately until Thackeray had cracked and eaten his last walnut. Then she rose with a forced pretence of repairing as usual to the drawing-room, but Malet, opening the door for her, heard her give a little gasp, saw her break into a run across the hall, and dart upstairs.

Uneasy himself about the child, for from the whispered duets outside his door—duets which were duels—he knew that for nearly a week she had taken scarcely any food, he presently followed Carry.

Upstairs he found an ominous quiet, broken only by

the occasional murmur of hushed voices and the fall of cautious feet. He went softly down the passage to the nursery door.

It stood ajar. He looked in.

The nurse had gone downstairs upon some mission, and Peter and Carry sat on opposite sides of a small white cot on which the lamplight fell, throwing up the shallow outline of a form so frail and slight as scarcely to make shadows on the coverlet.

All was silence. Carry was sitting with her head stooped forward, her eyes riveted upon the cot.

And Peter had taken off his coat. More than any of the other signs—more than the nurse's scared voice, the awed silence, the muffled footfalls, and Carry's stony face—the sight of Peter at the bedside in his shirtsleeves struck at Malet's heart.

For he knew that when easy-going Peter took off his coat to any business, this was a business indeed.

He returned to his room with a strange tightening of the throat. It was amazing how the little thing had gripped his affections with her perfervid baby personality, her precocities and fancies, the cling of her small eager arms, the frailness of her, and the strenuousness which suggested a soul-force inadequately guarded by her delicate body, like a keen blade in too frail a sheath.

He sat on through the hours with his door ajar, reading and listening, yet far more listening than reading, awaiting some change in the sounds outside. For he knew that from these he would learn how it was with the child.

At two in the morning, and thence till daybreak, the silence and footfalls and whisperings so deepened as to make him feel as though the house were muffled in a thick black pall. And amid the suffocating blackness of it, he watched with the eyes of his subconscious vision for the bright, quick flash through it of a little silver spirit—passing.



And all the while his brain was smoldering with rage and fume for the senseless, needless pain that those two women, with their clumsy positiveness, had inflicted on the hapless being entrusted to their charge.

With dawn there came such a change as he had listened for—a change in the sounds of the house. But it was not the change he had dreaded. The little silver spirit clung still in its frail sheath.

The pall lifted, the footsteps went crisper, the whispers lost their tension. And presently somebody spoke in a natural voice.

He stole to the nursery door again, and again looked in. Carry, with a sacred joy in her hard face, was heating something over a lamp.

In the white cot a little limb stirred languidly.

And Peter, standing among bowls and medicine bottles, was mopping a moist face—a face which looked ten years older than it had done ten hours earlier, but a face filled now with satisfaction.

Catching a glimpse of Malet stealing off, he came to the door.

"Hello!" he cried cheerfully.

He added in astonishment:

"Why, you haven't been to bed!"

Malet, annoyed to be detected in so damning a betrayal of feeling, protested sharply:

"Not been to bed! Why, I am up again and dressed."

"In a dinner-jacket?" Peter observed drily.

He came down the passage to grip his relative's hand, cordially.

"Thanks!" he said, his warm rough heart in his eyes.

"It was good of you to mind."

He added thickly:

"It's been a close shave—poor little thing! She's been missing her food and—her heart failed. She'll be all right now, with care."

The patient asking presently for "Little Boy," Malet went in for a minute to see her. He found it a pitiful sight.

She lifted a small leaden hand, and smiled faintly in greeting.

"L' Boy," she murmured, with a gleam of spirit, "I am——" The lips met and fell weakly apart again—upon an unmistakable "B" however.

Life again held glory!

## CHAPTER XXII

### A MIDNIGHT INTRUDER

**L**YGON awoke one night from his first sleep to a sound in the garden below.

His and Monica's rooms—the door long locked between them—overlooked the Italian garden, with its terraces and rose-wreathed pergolas which in summer spread a perfumed lake of blossom underneath their windows. And this side of the house was secluded and quiet, save for the concerts which took place there in the season of nightingales. Such doors as opened from it opened on the garden, and this was begirt by a high wall. Sounds here by day or by night were rare.

He rose, and going to one of the long French windows of his room, stepped out upon the broad stone balcony that ran along the house.

It was a dark night, but to his astonishment, through a trellis-work of beaten iron separating the balcony before the rooms, he made out a glimpse—brief and vanishing, but unmistakable—of a figure springing lightly from the parapet of the balcony and entering by the adjoining window.

He could not doubt his eyes, although for a trice he felt disposed to doubt his reason. The sound of the window closing convinced him of that which might otherwise have seemed hallucination.

His first thought was of burglars. At once, the iron screen barring him from the adjacent portion of the balcony, he ran back through his room into the corridor, and stood listening at Monica's door. Hearing voices, he turned the handle. The door was locked.

But he heard clearly a light and joyous laugh from Monica.

His hand, on the point of knocking on the door, dropped to his side at a thought that knocked upon his mind.

He barred it at the threshold. Even in the face of that which seemed like damning fact, and with the moth-eaten faiths of the man of the world—Monica was above suspicion. He waited to collect himself, and while he waited memory began to testify in swift impressions; her new mood, her rapt eyes that evening on the sunset, her smile, her softly falling tears——

Again he barred the thought. Monica was above suspicion.

Suddenly, however, without sanction of reason, but as it seemed in blind impulse, he knocked peremptorily upon the door.

"Monica!" he called. "Monica!"

Followed a long silence.

He knocked again, and called again. Soon her voice came from within in tones of surprise and excitement.

"Morant, is that you?"

"Yes." Then feeling explanation called for: "Is everything all right? I thought there was something wrong perhaps."

The key turned in the lock, and she appeared in the light which he had now switched on in the corridor.

She wore a long white dressing-robe, its lace frills falling loose about her throat. Her dark hair dropped in swathes, her dark eyes shone with tears and laughter, her mouth was quivering with excitement. She looked in her agitation and disarray, all her defences down, like a beautiful girl in a storm of emotion.

He had never previously seen her thus off guard—the guard of the shy young bride afraid of her awakening passions, and later the guard of the proud, rebellious, and neglected wife. For all he knew her in this aspect, she

might have been some beautiful girl he had surprised in his house.

The impression passed in one of astonishment at her story.

"I saw some one cross the balcony before your room," he began.

"It is Cyril," she said, in a voice tremulous with the happiness of the thing, and with laughter for its comedy. "He climbed out through his window at school, and has just now climbed in at mine. He could not live another hour without seeing his mother. Come in, Morant, and see him."

He went in with a certain diffidence. Not for years had he entered there. She had turned on all her electric burners to celebrate her prodigal's return. The beautiful white room had altered little since he had had it elaborately refurnished for his bride. Only now it was charged with atmosphere—with the warm, rich atmosphere an emotional woman imparts to her surroundings. As at a perfume too strong, his breath caught in his throat.

His attention was diverted. For there was another change in this room since last he had entered it.

There was in it now a big, handsome boy of twelve, with his father's fine physique in the making, and his mother's beauty: a noble boy, with candid, fearless eyes, the brow of a poet, and the strong mouth and chin of a character to reckon with.

In the full electric glare turned on him by his proud mother his eyes fell however, and his face flushing, he smiled rather sheepishly to be confronted by his father.

"Dad," he said, with an ingenuous clutch in his voice, "don't think me a rotter, but I just couldn't do without a sight of Mother. It'll be all right, you know. It's only two o'clock. I bicycled over—just under two hours, it took me—and I can get back long before they're up, and no one will discover."

His father, secretly as proud of this fine chap, whom seeing after absence he saw with new eyes, as was his mother, shook his head although he smiled.

"Well, don't do it again, Cyril. It isn't cricket! And you'll be getting into trouble."

"All right, Dad, only just this once. Honest Injin! But there was something I'd just got to say to Mother. I'd just got to, you know."

"Wouldn't it have kept? Or you could have written it."

The boy's face clouded. He shook his head.

"No, Dad."

"Not grumbles, I hope, Boy! We've all got to stand on our own feet. A chap who brings tales to his mother is no good, you know."

He cut short his sermon with a laugh, and moving up to him, held his hand and kissed him affectionately. After his absence, this fine fellow looked an uncommon fine fellow indeed.

"It's not grumbles in the ordinary sense, Dad. Only I wanted to tell Mother something, to see if she can't do something to put things straighter in the world."

Lygon smiled. The youngster seemed to look upon his mother as omnipotent.

"Shaping down at school?" he asked. "Slogging away at your work?"

"Oh yes, pretty decently, I think. Greek grammar's rather rotten, though."

Monica, all the while giving the boy her fond eyes and ears, had been moving quietly about the room, and now suddenly as though by a conjuring trick, a table appeared, furnished with a tin of biscuits, a box of meat lozenges, and a silver dish of chocolates. She drew a chair beside it.

"Come now, the prodigal must be fed after his travels," she said playfully. "Come, dear, eat while you talk. You must be famished."

"But I'm not hungry at all, Mother. Thirty miles is nothing. Oh, well, I don't mind if I have just one." He took a chocolate.

Healthy boy-appetite came with eating, and he was soon making inroads on the scratch meal. He talked while he ate, asked after his friends and pets. He wore a preoccupied look, however. It was plain there was something on his mind. And presently he was explaining.

"I don't quite know how to tell it before Dad," he began, "because you see, Mother, we've never said anything about it before him."

He took out a handkerchief which might have been cleaner, and scrubbed his hands in preparation for his task. The eye maternal rested on the handkerchief. The mother smiled. Cyril had not previously had the care of his wardrobe. She rose, and taking from a sachet on her dressing-table a handkerchief as plain as she could find there, she put this into his hands.

He blushed and laughed.

"I think it must be charcoal," he apologized. "I was making fireworks all the evening."

He sat fidgeting in his chair, twisting and untwisting the handkerchief in his strong young fingers, his eyes lowered, his cheeks reddened. Clearly he found it difficult to state his case.

He got up at last, and crossing to the fireplace, took up his stand there, one hand on the mantelpiece, a foot upon the kerb. With his eyes now averted, now turned full upon them, he began his story.

"You see, Father, it's like this. Before I went up to Eton, Mother told me some things about—about life, you know. She knew I'd got to know the things, and she wanted me to know them in the right way. And she told me about—being born, Dad. And she told me how wonderful it all is, a miracle, she said, that a baby should . . . grow like a rose grows, and be a part of its

mother before it's born. It's so small and weak, you know, that it isn't big enough or strong enough to live in the world, and it lives in a little warm nest under her heart. And she breathes for it, and feeds it with her own blood, and takes ever so much care it shan't be hurt in any way.

"I hadn't ever heard of this till Mother told me. And, Dad, I just sat down and blubbed. I couldn't help it, could I, Mother? It made me feel so strange—frightened and glad and queer all over. It seemed so wonderful. And it's so—so clinking of mothers to do all this for us, because they might die when we are born. It's why we love them so, even before we know about it. Did your mother tell you how beautiful and wonderful all this is, Dad, before you went to school?"

Lygon, who had grown almost as shamefaced as his boy, said:

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why, perhaps she didn't think of it like that," he answered, somewhat at a loss to answer.

"Well, Mother said, don't think about it much or talk of it, because it isn't a thing to talk about. It isn't any business of ours as long as we're only boys, and can't properly understand it. You don't talk about God and your religion, she said, because they're . . . they're high things between you and your soul, and not to be talked about. And she said there were people—like there are people who have no religion and don't believe in God, you know—she said there were people who didn't know these things were high and wonderful, because they didn't understand them in the right way.

"But I was to trust to her, and whatever anybody said I was always to believe them in her way. And I do, of course. How could I help it after hearing Mother talk so rippingly? And how can they be anything else but—just wonderful?"



He hung his head. He kicked the kerb. He twisted the handkerchief—now a mere rope—in and out his strenuous young fingers. Then he broke out hotly:

"Father, you should hear these chaps talk. It makes you sick. They've got it all wrong. Nobody has told them right, and they don't understand a bit. You might think there was nothing right or beautiful in all the world. It seems so—so rotten, Dad, and so—so childish not to see a great thing like this in a manly, understanding way. It's as though they hadn't got mothers of their own, as though they were only bounders out of dirty slums. Did chaps talk like that when you were a boy?"

"Oh, something like it."

"Well, of course it's only because nobody has told them right. How can chaps like us know things right, if nobody puts us on the right road? . . . And then one night last week I simply couldn't stand it, and I tried to tell them just as Mother had told me. But it only sounded silly when I said it. They ragged and threw things at me and called names. So I told them the next one who said anything about women, I'd just punch his blooming head for him. And so I did, but I got jolly well licked myself, I tell you, with the lot of 'em. And it wasn't any use. A chap like me—only one of themselves—can't make them understand.

"So I thought if Mother would go herself and see old Lyttleton, and tell him how the chaps have got things wrong, and tell him how she put me right, it would make all the difference in the way the chaps grow up, you know."

"But nowadays they do tell you——"

"Oh yes. They tell us about fishes and rabbits. But they don't show us that it's wonderful and beautiful, as Mother did. . . . There, now I've made Mother cry."

He dashed a hand across his eyes, and turning his back, stood staring down into the fire, abased and crestfallen, it seemed, to find himself mentally naked and

ashamed, having in his fervor cast away the garments of his everyday reserves.

His father and mother sat deeply moved by his ingenuousness, and by the temperamental innocence which persuaded him that to be shown the right way, was all that was needed to regenerate the world of boys.

Monica, who had been envisioning with tender pride the fair soul of this fair boy of hers, and marking resemblances in him to the man she loved, was weeping silently.

Lygon, his wife and his son almost in the same line of perspective, by the slightest movement of his eyes, had upon his retina in the same moment the faces of these two he was planning to desert. And the sense of his impending desertion hung during the whole scene like a Damocles' sword above his head, giving to all that passed a gravity it might not otherwise have had.

Through the boy's words he glimpsed the white and tender mother buckling with fond, fearful hands his boyish armor on him before sending him out into the world. He felt intuitively what it must have cost her to surrender her own delicate reserves in thus arming her boy. He wondered whether it had not been his part to forewarn the boy; and he remembered, without any attempt to justify himself, that not only had he never given a thought to the matter, but that he had been vastly too much engrossed with his anxieties concerning Mrs. Ferrers to have had thought to bestow upon it.

It surprised him to find Monica setting this high interpretation upon natural facts which, man though he was and manly, had seemed to him always rather to detract from the æsthetics of living.

He had taken it for granted that her cold fastidiousness disdained in the place of dignifying these things. With the quick flashing of thought, it was revealed to him that this ennobling of motherhood and parenthood,

while it added new values, added also new responsibilities to life—and to love, whence they proceeded.

There recurred to him that saying of Mrs. Ferrers', that he should be profoundly grateful to Monica for having given him the noble gift of such a son as his, the noblest gift a woman could confer upon a man.

And suddenly, his looks dwelling on his wife as she sat in her white robe, a white cheek, her shining eyes and the curve of an eyelid with its lifted fringes turned upon her boy—suddenly for the first time he did feel grateful to her, not tepidly grateful, but passionately moved to her for this fine fellow that his boy was.

For the first time he realized the faculty of fatherhood as a high human privilege. It was born in upon him that the boy's native purity was from her, and, too, that this final armoring of him for the fray had been the climax merely of a long and daily armoring of him, and nurturing of him and shaping of him, during his twelve years of existence.

All these years, despite her rank and social obligations, he had been her main care. She had never left him for longer than days, had herself ministered to him and administered every smallest detail of his upbringing. She had even nursed him at her breast.

There had been a struggle over this. It was contrary to the traditions of her set that she should do so, and he had objected, because to be thus bound to an infant interfered necessarily with her social obligations. Young as she was, however, taught by some mother-instinct, she had seen that her maternal obligations stood before all else, and holding out against him, had had her way.

She was Irish by one parent, and she had told him the Irish tradition that babes who are not nourished by their mothers have no souls. And once, coming upon her with her beautiful boy at her beautiful breast, he had thought with an odd rush of sentiment that if the boy were drinking with her milk the tenderness that radiated from her

eyes, then truly she was feeding his soul the while she fed his infant body.

These thoughts supplementing and illumining in flashes Cyril's halting story, he was aware of his view-point of life suddenly readjusting itself. That spot of supreme self-centeredness which was his passion for Mrs. Ferrers and which had seemed to him to be the keystone of his being, became less intensely circumscribed, extending its area.

And in a far more personal manner than he had ever previously felt it, a quickened realization of his inherent responsibility to them found place for his wife and his boy. Of his material responsibility to them, being an honorable man, he had been always fully sensible.

The boy's innocent faith and ideals abashed him. He wished the world into which by way of his fatherhood he had beguiled this high young soul, had been a better place. His conscience smote him with the knowledge that, little part as he had taken in its guidance heretofore, now more than ever he was about to cast the burden of it on the mother. With this wider conception of paternal responsibilities, those restless forces of his manhood whereof he had lately been conscious, spurring him to worthier life and activity, acquired a fuller meaning. He saw that while Monica had been, whole-hearted and whole-souled, fulfilling her mother's part, the man's part, the father's part, to battle with the world for food and nurture for his offspring, and otherwise to guide and to safeguard it, had been left undone.

Cyril, now keeping silence and standing shamefaced and downcast, because stripped to the soul, Lygon moved up to him and put an arm about him.

"Dear boy," he said fondly, "don't worry about it all. You and I cannot—not even your mother can—put the world right, you know. All we can do is to do our own part as decently as we know how. These boys are only

ignorant young asses. There's no great harm in them."

"Oh, but, Father," he cried, with a sob in his throat, "you won't let it go on, will you? You'll do something to stop it. You'll do something to put them right—you and Mother. Couldn't you see the Head about it?" He stopped, and then broke out, "Oh, it's—just hell to live in it. It—it fouls your mind."

Lygon pulled him to him and kissed his brows.

"I'm afraid we've got to take our world as we find it, Cyril. You'll get used to it presently. It's the breaking in that's hard. But there are always decent chaps everywhere. You can make friends of them."

"But, Father, can't you really do anything?"

"I'm afraid not."

"And must I go back to it all?"

A little choke from Monica reinforced the appeal. Lygon was firm, however.

"You must, of course," he said. "But don't take it so to heart. As I tell you, these chaps are only ignorant young asses, and there's no great harm in them. A boy can't expect every one to be good and pure like his mother, you know. And the way to be a decent man is to set your teeth in the face of things, and be, yourself, as decent as you know how. But you've got to let other chaps go their way as well. They have a right to, you know, although it isn't your way."

"But, Father, if only they could be shown the right way?"

"It's no use talking, Boy. As I say, you and I can't set the world right. It isn't quite so easy as you think. And—but it's time for you to be off. You must not be discovered. And no more midnight flittings, Cyril, or there will be trouble."

The boy stood motionless. Then he gulped, gave one swift mop to his eyes, and faced round.

"All right, Dad," he said, squaring his shoulders. "I'll be off, then. I feel better now it's out. . . . I'd got to

see if something couldn't be done. But if it can't, why I must stick it. No, I won't run home again. But I had to get it out this once."

He pulled up his collar and buttoned his coat. He sighed and fidgeted. Then bracing himself, he crossed the room, and stretching up kissed his father's face.

"Good-bye, Dad," he said, wringing his hand. "I'll just stick it, and try not to hear them. I'll go in hard at games. And it will soon be Christmas."

His face began to work as he approached his mother. He controlled it bravely.

"Good-bye, Mums! I was a mug to wake you up. And don't worry. I'll stick it all right. When you know there's nothing to be done, why, you know there's just nothing to be done."

Those who armor others must first armor themselves. It was a blanched but a calm and composed face that Cyril drew to his, and with an arm about her, was closely hugged to his mother's heart.

With one last gulp and without looking round, he ran out lightly by the window and out upon the balcony. Leaving no time for suggestion that he might depart by the way of convention, he was over the parapet in a twinkling and slipping lithely down a stone pillar. Often with a boy's delight in the novel and adventurous, he had come this way to his mother's room.

The parents looking over at him, watched and lost his moving outlines. But they heard his feet strike lightly in the gravel. He called up a last "Good-bye, Dad!" "Good-bye, Mother!" Then his footsteps were lost in the night.

Lygon, standing on the balcony beside his wife, felt suddenly tongue-tied and awkward. He held the window for her to pass back into her room. Then fastening the catch, he followed.

"Nice boy, that!" he observed carelessly, shutting the door on sentiment as he had shut the window on the

night. "But it was too bad of him to wake you up to tell you all his rigmarole."

"Oh, I am afraid he is unhappy," she said grievously.

He shrugged a shoulder.

"He'll shake down all right. He's got to face his world some time, dear chap. I suspect you've made too much of him—been too good to him, you know."

His eyes dwelled on her. Now that they were alone together she had withdrawn again into her reserves, and showed a certain self-conscious restraint that was strangely virginal. Alluring as he would have found it in another woman, in his wife he found it embarrassing.

Men are but seldom subtle enough to comprehend the finer mysteries of sex, and Lygon had no suspicion of the true significance of this same virginal charm in her. The truth was, that although she had been married to him for more than a decade, her essential nature was still vestal, he never having entered into possession of this. For mere physical possession is but an outer court of the eternal mystery of love.

He said abruptly,

"It's shocking late. Good-night, Monica."

"Good-night, Morant," she responded absently. For the moment the mother in her was paramount, and her thoughts were traveling with her boy, lighting and safeguarding his lonely way.

And since thought is an actual force and tender thoughts are guardian angels, no harm came to him, so attended.

## CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. FERRERS AND CARRY

CHRISTMAS came and went.

On New Year's Day there foregathered again at Travenhoe, in order to rehearse the Pageant, that same house-party which had previously assembled there.

The only person missing was Professor Glubb, whom Lygon had punctiliously invited, not because he had added anything socially—or archæologically, as he had been expected to do—to the last occasion, but in order to spare him the mortification of discovering that he had failed to do so. Glubb stood in small danger, however, of suspecting anything concerning himself which would have been mortifying.

Although he wished greatly to be present, he declined the invitation, partly in order to punish the company for having rejected his one and impracticable suggestion, but mainly to punish his yellow butterfly for having subsequently ignored his existence. Despite his theretofore impeccable principles, he had reflected, complacently stroking his long white beard, there was really no knowing what might not have come of it, had the flaxen charmer but realized that he had been in earnest, in the place of huffing, as he believed her to be doing, because she suspected him of trifling with her. For even, he confessed to himself, an archæologist was no more than a man.

Malet was invited, and he accepted with warm anticipations. During the interval his friendship with the Lygons had strengthened, they having extended some further charming hospitalities to him.



He had seen, well-pleased, the change that had occurred in their relations; seen that if they were still far from being lovers, they were at all events vastly better friends than they had previously been. And Monica, from being hard and rebelliously unhappy, was still unhappy, but gently so, and with becoming dignity. Malet now saw in her a sweet and noble woman, her emotions illumined with the lamp of her clear mind.

Sage though he was, and though he saw her distant from himself as were the poles, the anticipation of renewing acquaintance with Mrs. Ferrers caused him perturbations.

Over and beyond his keenness to renew this ravishing acquaintance however, he was interested to learn how things stood with her and Lygon. He saw him fevered and restive, galled as he was by the time-yoke she had put upon him, and yet passionately suffering it because it was a yoke of time merely. It passed Malet's comprehension that she should thus torment him—holding him bound to her and yet making, as it seemed, a sport of him—if, as it appeared, she cared to make no more of him. And yet he had thought she cared.

He was present at their first meeting on this as on the former occasion. As before, she arrived later than the other guests, motoring as she had done then.

He saw in a moment that their relations had entered upon a new phase. The nature of it he was powerless to guess. From a certain new air of confidence and mastery on Lygon's part however, delicate and restrained though this was, and, too, from just a gossamer touch of self-consciousness flecking her brilliant composure, he could not help suspecting that the inevitable had occurred.

The suspicion soon waned. He knew his kind too well to mistake this still turbulent and restive man for a successful lover.

Beautiful as he had realized her to be, he was never-

theless unprepared to find her quite so beautiful as he found her in the traveling pelisse of petunia satin (man-like he called it purple) in which she broke a second time upon his vision.

Now, as ever, her entry was the signal for a sudden silence and sharp turning of heads, involuntary tribute always paid to her, every one requiring all his wits to enjoy to the full that spectacle of her bearing her wonderful face up the room, like a beautiful masterpiece set high upon her lovely throat and shoulders.

She gave largess of smiles and glances as she went, and greetings in those silver tones of hers.

It was loveliness phenomenal. Rising upon the scene, all other beauties showed as though their lights had been turned suddenly low.

Malet saw Monica's eyes follow her, with mute pain like motes in them. They expressed that it was hopeless for any other to compete with such perfection, hopeless to expect a man to hold his own against it.

He saw her, after she had greeted and exchanged some courtesies with her guest, move up to Cyril, who, now at home for the vacation, was staring with all his eyes at this surpassing woman. She stole a hand into one of his and smiled upon him with a wistful fondness, as though beseeching him not to go over likewise to the enemy. Her glance expressed, too, that in him, her son, lay now her pride and only solace.

He thought the boy looked pale, that where his young brows had been clear and cloudless, now they showed troubled and perplexed. Knowing nothing of a certain midnight confidence, he had no clue to the shadow which life was already laying on this bright young soul.

The famous actor-manager came down, and there was a dress rehearsal of the Pageant.

Mrs. Ferrers, in her jeweled crown and ermined mantle, made a notable Queen Eleanor. Charming though Monica's Rosamund was in her flaxen wig and

wreath of lilies, one might well have wondered that the King should turn his faithless eyes elsewhere.

A moment of illumination Malet received however, realizing in this other charms of repose and of tenderness lacking in the splendid Queen. Again he was seized with that craving to force the secrets of this super-woman. Was there a heart in her? Did passions and emotions thrill her? Could she be fond? Despite his insight, she foiled him now as ever. He could no more see into the soul of her, than one can see into the heart of a many-faceted diamond flashing its thousand dazzling, baffling rays at every point.

Monica, perhaps to charm Lygon, perhaps merely from a natural pride which moved her to play her part well, gave a certain delicate distinction to the character of Rosamund. Her voice was rich and low, and a note of poignancy in it so well suited the rôle of the ill-fated Fair One, that it might well have been a method of dramatic art.

In the one short scene between her and the King, she played with so much feeling and sincerity as to surprise all. Only Malet knew that her heart rather than her art was speaking.

The sayings and doings of the house-party on this occasion need not be detailed, since these did nothing to alter the course of the story.

Glubb's yellow butterfly arrived on the second day—so soon, that was, as she had learned that Glubb was not of the party. For till her husband had sent her a certain cryptic telegram it was supposed she was not well enough to come. The message, "*Rip Van Winkle absit*," vastly though it puzzled the footman charged with its transmission, sufficiently reassured her as to bring her fluttering to Travenhoe by an early train.

Foulger, the handsome Under-Secretary, some of his fine feathers drooping beneath the strain of office, was

there with Lady Violet, whose services had been requisitioned for a dance. She was embarrassing the management by stipulating that these services should be rewarded by the privilege of appearing in public so under-clad as would under other circumstances have inevitably resulted in her being marched off summarily to a police-station.

Chalmers, the steeple-chaser, who since Malet had last seen him had contrived to find yet another unbroken bone in his redoubtable little body to be broken, was there, and was as much surprised as he had been before to find that Malet still found life endurable without hunting.

So, too, the Duchess of Skye was of the party, sulky in petticoats, the harem-trouser madness having been sturdily nipped in the bud by the good taste and sanity of the British working-man, who would have none of it, and had not scrupled to enforce his sound judgment by mobbing.

There were hunting and Bridge to lighten the labors of rehearsal; and this time a fancy ball, the party being supplemented by friends of the Lygons having houses in the neighborhood, and by a contingent of dancing men from Town.

Malet, who held, with some others, that life would be tolerable were it not for its amusements, found himself, although interested as an intelligent observer, nevertheless fatigued as a sane individual by the whirl of festivities. He set off accordingly one early afternoon to walk across the park, meaning to pass a pleasant hour at "Roseberry" in the good comradeship of his good books.

He had, too, an amiable thought to please Carry by showing her that he could well desert this brilliant company in order to drink tea with her.

Great was his surprise upon entering the wood of the Weeping Women, to see before him on the path to

"Roseberry," the elegant form of Mrs. Ferrers—without escort, and so muffled in a cloak as to make it appear like a cloak to identity. She walked with a light, swift gait, and as one with some mission.

His surprise to see her alone, who so seldom escaped from her admirers, was less even than was his surprise to see her at all. For he had heard her tell Monica after luncheon that she must tear herself away from some plan of amusement in order to give two hours in her room to arrears of correspondence.

His surprise became renewed amazement that this gifted and distinguished woman should stoop to Peter Corry. For with certain facts in his mind, he felt no doubt as to her destination. A chill wind was blowing, a chill rain falling. It was not an afternoon on which a woman and a town-dweller would walk for the sake merely of walking. Moreover, by this time she had turned off into the side-path which led direct to Peter's house, the house having been once the residence of the family agent.

Averse to overlook her movements unknown to her, he quickened his pace in order to come up with her. Her own was so rapid, however, that he did not overtake her until she was already in the "Roseberry" drive.

He raised his hat and said:

"I was on my way to pay a visit to my relatives who live here when I saw you in the wood."

He saw just a shade of vexation, perhaps of constraint, cloud her face. The return of her perfect composure was immediate, however.

"And I am going to visit the doctor of my wrist," she answered. "It has been troubling me again."

Bentham, the parlormaid, beaming to see Malet, preceded them across the hall and opened the drawing-room door.

At once, with an air of having blundered, she half closed it, and stood barring the way, awkward and

striving for an explanation suited to a visitor so important as the lady showed.

There remaining nothing else to be done, since he could not bundle Mrs. Ferrers back into the hall, Malet pushed past the girl, and reopening the door, ushered his companion in. He saw at once the cause of Bentham's hesitation.

Carry was sitting in the middle of the room, a large linen-basket before her, and with some of its contents about her was mending a sheet.

Now to mend sheets is as much a human obligation and in its way as meritorious as it is to wear a crown. Yet there are few women of Carry's set and of Carry's narrow views of life who would not feel mortified to be discovered so employed.

Malet, who was nothing of a snob and far too large-minded to admit such false and artificial considerations, experienced a moment of whimsical malice at the notion of Carry's discomfiture. But this lighter vein was supplanted quickly by a graver one.

Carry, of late, in a spirit of contrariety and pique at Peter's indifference, had become careless of her dress. And this afternoon her hair, which she had once been wont to dress elaborately, was ruffled and awry; her blouse was tumbled, her skirt creased and shabby.

With her dull complexion, in which was now no spark of animation, he had never seen her look to so poor advantage. Nor, he saw from her ill-concealed chagrin, had she ever felt less so, as, realizing who were her visitors, she set aside her sheet and rose to greet them.

She darted one swift glance of reprobation at her relative for having thus brought her rival upon her, as she supposed designedly and without warning. After this, she had eyes for nothing but that rival.

Her chagrin to be discovered so employed was swallowed for a space in stupefaction at the beauty confronting her. Then swirled a tempest of furious

jealousy, contorting her face and bringing into strong relief the latent evil and worst traits of it.

The transformation was so hateful that he turned away his eyes. Then he made his introductions:

"Mrs. Peter Corry—Mrs. Ferrers. Mrs. Ferrers has come over to see Peter about her wrist, Carry. It still troubles her. And I have come over to see you," he added placably.

Her face changed again. Now it grew smooth and suave and quite composed. And from her deep-set, slate-blue eyes, as she held out her hand to the visitor, she unfurled a velvet smile.

Malet was disagreeably impressed. He hated smiling eyes. He knew that whensoever you saw a man or a woman whose eyes appeared to smile, you saw one capable of betraying you.

Treacherous persons are not always perpetrating treacheries. Like their neighbors, they do kind and creditable actions. Yet whensoever you see smiling eyes you do well to be upon your guard, because the treachery behind them may at any moment flash into fact.

Malet felt strangely uneasy watching these two, Mrs. Ferrers bearing herself with her accustomed grace, Carry regarding her with smiling eyes.

Because of deeper primal instincts stirring in her, Carry forgot to make excuses for her sheet, as there was no cause, of course, for her to do, but as she would certainly have done had not her mind been otherwise engaged.

"My husband has just gone out, I am sorry to say," she told the visitor in a voice Malet had not previously heard from her—a voice as velvet as her eyes. "But if you do not mind waiting, he will not be long."

"Thank you, I will wait if I may."

She seated herself, and added with a pleasant laugh:

"I had not thought of Dr. Corry as a Benedict, do you know, but as a medical enthusiast."

Carry's expression told Malet that the words confirmed the charge she had already entered against Peter of posing as a bachelor at large.

"The two characters are not incompatible," he said, to relieve a certain tension.

"My husband is very enthusiastic about his work," Carry added with a forced ingenuousness. She continued suavely, "What a pity your wrist is still painful! I hope it is not serious. Sprains seem simple enough, but I have heard my husband say they are more troublesome than people think."

And all the while, above these girlish platitudes, which were quite unlike her customary shrewd, crisp talk, her eyes were smiling.

Malet saw that as the smile was a cloak for bitter animosity, the platitudes were covering swift thought. He saw that she was thinking hard and strenuously. She gave him an impression of forging in some chamber of her mind a suddenly conceived design. He wondered what she contemplated.

"Yes, sprains are sometimes very tiresome, I know," Mrs. Ferrers agreed. She changed the subject.

"We have been rehearsing the Pageant," she said, to make talk.

She had left her cloak in the hall, and in a handsome dress of dark green cloth, she made a striking contrast with the graceless, shabby figure of her hostess—a contrast whereof, as it unfortunately happened, their reflections in a mirror opposite kept Carry reminded.

"Are you taking part?"

It was a sore point with Carry that she had not been asked to do this. Over and above the Travenhoe party, a number of her friends and neighbors had been invited to play in the Pageant.

"No," she answered; adding, rather stiffly, "I have very little time for such amusements."

"I suppose it is an amusement," Mrs. Ferrers said,



"but it means a good deal of work too. Mr. Malet will tell you how industriously we are all learning and rehearsing our parts, and how we are scolded by our Master."

They talked on, the visitor with her well-bred wish to please, Carry with her platitudes, while Malet filled in awkward pauses. For the talk went lamely.

When presently a clock upon the mantelpiece struck three, Carry's eyes went round and riveted themselves upon it. The smiles became a cold glitter. Mrs. Ferrers put a question twice to her before she answered.

Then she turned quickly.

"I'm so sorry. Yes, I think there will be nearly a hundred performers from Foxgate—soldiers and nuns and that sort of thing."

She said to Malet, in a curiously breathless voice :

"Do go up, Uncle, and see Elfie. She would be broken-hearted if you were to leave without seeing her."

"But of course I shall see her. I am not going yet, Carry."

"But she will be going for her walk."

He glanced at the window. The rain had increased to a downpour. He saw the slanting lines of it against a wall of firs.

"Not in this weather, surely?"

"Oh, you know I never keep her in for weather. Rain or hail or snow, I always send her out. It hardens children, I think," she explained to Mrs. Ferrers.

It being clear to Malet that for some reason she wished to be rid of him, he went reluctantly. It was but seldom that he had the privilege of Mrs. Ferrers' society save as one of a circle, three deep. He went accordingly, with a sense of grudge against Carry.

On the stairs as he went up, he met, coming down, Dixon, one of the two keepers of the homicidal lunatic whose room adjoined that he had occupied when first

at "Roseberry." Dixon was a big, coarse, rather brutal-looking person, although Corry had told him he was trustworthy and kind.

"The job isn't good enough for a better sort of chap," Peter had said. "Nobody with nerves or any sensitiveness could stick it, living most of his time with a man who's always watching for a chance to vivisection him. It's a strange case. The madman is a famous physiologist. He has spent his life in research work on the brain, and he's found out, or he thinks he has—because, like everything else in physiology, all his discoveries are disputed by equally famous physiologists—some point in brain-localization.

"So far, his experiments have been on monkeys. Now he wants to settle the disputed point by experiments on men. That, of course, is what experiments on animals lead up to. There are too many millions of years of evolutionary difference between men and monkeys for monkey-experiments to decide questions about human brains. And so, as Professor Starling says, 'the final experiment must be on man.' And my madman was found one morning with his laboratory boy strapped upon his table, and his knife in mid air.

"It's a case of moral insanity merely. For the life of him he can see no reason against vivisectioning humans. Science demands it, he says, and Science must have it. He talks quite lucidly and cleverly on other subjects, and considers the public feeling against human vivisection a mere crazy sentiment which is blocking the way of knowledge.

"After the business of the laboratory boy, they thought it time to lock him up. And chaps like Dixon and Saunders, more muscle and bone than anything else, are quite good enough to look after a chap of his views. He'd spend his whole time, if I allowed it, in most horrible mutilations of animals. It has become a craze. But all the time, he's waiting for—his man."

"Well, Dixon," Malet said now, returning his greeting. "You are going off duty, I see. Glad enough to do so, I should think. Eh?"

The madman was left to himself every day for two hours, solitude having been found to soothe and quiet him.

Dixon stopped, and trailed a purple handkerchief across his heavy brows.

"Well, I don't pine to be back with him," he answered briskly. "A reg-lar caution, *he* is, to live all your time locked in with, and his table spread out in hopes he'll catch you nappin'. He's been fairly sreekin' this last hour to 'ave my bloomin' brains.

"All for the good o' science, Dixon," he says—as rational as you and me when he stops sreekin'.

"Not this time, Purfessor," I tells him, quiet-like. 'I've not quite finished with 'em myself yet.'

"And then he starts sreekin' again, fit to make your hair curl."

He went on heavily down the stairs, the key of the madman's steel door in his hand, it being his duty on quitting the room to deposit this unfailingly with Dr. or with Mrs. Corry.

Malet continued his way up the stairs, feeling a trifle sick, and pondering the singularity of things which enabled one by turning a key in a lock to live secure in mind and body next door to such a wild-beast nature. For by this time he too had grown so accustomed to the fact of his deranged neighbors, that they had ceased to trouble him.

He found the nursery empty. Elfie was taking the air. He walked to the window, and looking out upon the slanting sheets of rain, reflected impatiently upon the madness of taking out a delicate child in such weather.

This was one only of many fads which Carry, self-opinionated as she was, exploited at the child's expense. Shoeless and stockingless feet were others; hatlessness

another, albeit she herself went comfortably shod and hosed, and with eyes sheltered by a brim.

He repaired to his room, and since Carry had plainly desired to be rid of him, rummaged for a while among his papers.

After an interval he went downstairs again. Whatsoever Carry might wish, he declined to be further defrauded of priceless minutes.

To his surprise, in descending he heard again the ponderous clash of the homicide's door closing. The thought occurred that Dixon must have returned for some reason to the madman's room. To his further surprise, he caught a glimpse of Carry running quickly down the stairs before him. He followed, and lost sight of her. Crossing the hall he opened the drawing-room door.

The room was empty. Neither Carry nor Mrs. Ferrers was there. He felt angry that Mrs. Ferrers should have left the house during his absence. He went in search of Carry to learn why she had not waited for Peter. He wondered whether Carry had been rude to her.

Carry was in the dining-room. She turned a face like white paper. To his astonishment she went out quickly by another door. She mumbled something unintelligible.

"Carry, where is Mrs. Ferrers?" he called after her. She called back that Mrs. Ferrers was with Peter.

He felt uneasy, her manner and action being unaccountable. He set them down to the fact that her rival was with Peter however, and dropping into a chair began to read a paper he found lying on a table.

There was nothing interesting in it, and he turned it over with a sense of boredom. For how long he so occupied himself he could not tell.

Peter walked in, drying his hands in his handkerchief. His face and hair were wet; his boots soaked.

"Beastly weather!" he observed disgustedly.

"Why didn't you let *me* take Mrs. Ferrers back?" his uncle asked, aggrieved.

"Take Mrs. Ferrers back! Where and when?" asked Peter. A look of interest chased the disgust of his expression.

He paused in the process of drying his hands, and put another question.

"Has she been here?"

Malet rose up quickly.

"She came over to see you. Carry told me she was with you."

"Then Carry told a silly lie," he retorted curtly. "I haven't seen Mrs. Ferrers since Monday. I suppose she sent her back in all this rain."

"Heaven knows!" Malet's uneasiness now became acute. "Let us find Carry and ask her."

Peter shrugged a sulky shoulder, declining to join a search for Carry. Malet went out quickly.

A maid he met told him that the visitor had not left the house so far as she knew; said she had seen her going up the stairs a short time previously with Mrs. Carry. Further questioned, she said her mistress had just now gone upstairs alone.

Malet became alarmed, but still indefinitely so. For although the remembrance of Carry's eyes disquieted him, he could not believe that she would do her guest an actual injury. Nevertheless he found himself climbing the stairs in all haste.

As though led by instinct, he sought the corridor on which the madman's door opened.

Carry was there, her body bent at an angle outside the door, her ear against it, as though listening with every sense for sounds within.

He himself stood silent for an instant, but could hear no sound.

Then, "Carry!" he called.

He would never forget the face she turned to him—the face of fear, of dread, of evil exultation. The next

moment, however, everything had slipped from it save fear—cold, white, blighting fear.

She broke into convulsive shuddering. She cried out through her chattering teeth:

"Save her! . . . Fetch Peter! . . . Fetch Dixon! Mrs. Ferrers . . . is in there with . . . the madman!"

Before she could finish, the whole situation flashed upon him. He remembered the clash of the closing door. He did not wait to ask a question. The fact was enough in all conscience.

He ran along the corridor, and shouted desperately down the stairs.

"Peter! Peter! Dixon! Dixon!"

There was that in his voice to set men running. The sound of scurrying footsteps followed.

He ran back.

"Where is the key?"

Her trembling fingers thrust it into his. His trembling fingers thrust it into the lock.

"*For God's sake, never tell Peter . . . I did it,*" she shuddered out.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE MADMAN

**W**HEN Malet had left them, Carry and her guest went on with their halting talk. Now it went more halting still, not only because it now lacked Malet to help it out, but because, too, Carry became all at once so absent-minded that she seemed to talk at random. So unaccountable her manner was, that Mrs. Ferrers could think nothing but that her mind was slightly affected.

"You are sure Dr. Corry will be home soon?" she asked. "Because I really ought to return to write some letters."

"Oh, you must not go yet," Carry said tensely. "I mean—he is sure to be in soon. And it would be such a pity for you to have come through the rain without seeing him. He is sure to be in soon."

A diversion was caused by a knock on the drawing-room door. Carry's eyes had been going all the while to it—looking for Corry, Mrs. Ferrers supposed. The knock could not be Corry's however, for Corry would not knock upon his own drawing-room door. And yet from her eyes one might have gathered that this was what his wife had been waiting for.

She rose, all white and agitated, and went to the door. She half opened it, standing in the aperture. Something was said in a gruff man's voice. She closed it again, and returned to her chair. One of her hands was shut tight, as though upon something of import.

"My husband has returned," she said, adding, like

one repeating a message: "He hopes you will excuse him for not coming, as he is professionally engaged. I am to take you to his study in five minutes."

The visitor sighed relief. Woman of the world as she was, and an adept in the art of conversation, she had been finding it a tax to keep the ball rolling with this awkward little person.

"That is fortunate. I really should not have trusted to chance, but should have asked him to make an engagement. With these difficult patients under his charge, his time must be so fully occupied."

Carry stared. How did Mrs. Ferrers know about the "difficult patients"? She felt annoyed. Neither Peter nor she spoke of them ordinarily to strangers. Peter, indeed, had at one time been proud of the charge of souls committed to his care, but Carry had infected him with her desire for secrecy upon the subject.

She considered it so much more creditable to keep up a large imposing house for occupation by Peter, herself, and Elfie only, than for a more extended usefulness. She was annoyed not only because Mrs. Ferrers knew otherwise, but because the fact of Peter having told her argued terms of confidence between them.

Her hand relaxed its clutch upon a little key with complicated edges, in order that she might better enjoy the feeling of it on her palm.

"I gather that you have a little girl," the visitor said, introducing a subject which she thought might well bridge over the minutes intervening before Carry would be ready for her.

"Yes, I have a little girl of four. Have you any children?"

Mrs. Ferrers shook her lovely head.

"I do not care for children," she replied, in a voice so silver as almost to excuse the sentiment.

"Well, they're a great responsibility. I have only one—I don't know what I should do if I had more. It



takes up so much time, thinking and planning for and training her."

"I have heard mothers say that half a dozen children are less trouble and anxiety than an only one is. The care and affection are divided up, and the children look after one another."

"But the expense is so much greater," Carry said, a little frown between her brows.

"Oh, the expense must be greater, of course!" was conceded with the vague indifference of one who had never required to consider this trifle.

When the clock on the mantelpiece chimed a quarter past three, Carry was taken with a little fit of shivering. It passed, leaving her curiously rigid.

Suddenly she raised and poised her little flattened head; her drooped lids fluttered slightly on her eyes, and then flashed coldly open.

She stood erect.

"It is time," she said. "Will you come now, please, to my husband."

Mrs. Ferrers, following, saw the angular, embarrassed figure become lithe and sinuous. Quick as she was herself with nervous power, she was put to it to keep pace with it. By the time she joined her in the corridor upon the second floor, she found her slipping a key into a lock.

She turned her face and smiled stiffly.

"You will find my husband here in his study. I need not go in."

She pushed the door slightly open; then in a trice, gripping her visitor's arm, she swept her through the aperture and shut the door behind her.

Mrs. Ferrers, standing surprised and doubtless ruffled to be thus unceremoniously treated, found herself almost in darkness. Then, her sight accommodating itself to the gloom, she saw that she was standing in a narrow

ante-room divided by a curtain from a larger room, a glimpse of which was visible to one side of the curtain.

She paused to smooth her ruffled feathers after the profane handling of her sacred person by this extraordinary wife of Corry's; then she went forward, and setting back the curtain, entered the further room.

As she passed the border land between them, she remarked a strong steel gate which, moving in a shining groove, was clearly intended to effect a haven of retreat in case of need. She experienced a disagreeable sensation. No doubt the doctor's study was a scene sometimes of gruesome happenings.

Her sense of the disagreeable increased, when in the place of Dr. Corry she found herself in the presence of a dark, unprepossessing-looking stranger, who, clad in a long, white linen overall, was sitting bent above a metal-topped table with formidable-looking clamps and straps attached to it on every side. So absorbed he was that he did not hear her, but went on with his task.

She had time, thus, before he observed her, to see what his task was. She had time to feel sick and deathly faint, and to look back desperately to the door, intending flight the moment her faintness should have passed sufficiently to allow of this. She had yet no suspicion of the full horror of the situation. She supposed this dark, absorbed man in the linen overall to be an assistant of Corry's—an assistant occupied in scientific research. And faint and nauseated, horror and sudden paralysis of will held her riveted upon his work.

To one side of him stood a big glass bowl half filled with living frogs, and on the other side a cage of mice which swarmed and clambered over one another in a squirming mass, squeaking dismally, as though in a desperate panic. Before him was an iron clamp affixed to the table, and on something in the grip of this his whole attention was absorbed.

All down the metal-topped table there were hideous

objects, lying now as bloody, inert blotches, motionless and formless, and now, with a horrible suggestion of a sense of terror being all that remained to them of sense, suddenly detaching themselves from pools of blood in which they lay to drag what was left of them, halting, lop-sided, and writhing, to some coign of safety from the man. Some of these miserable objects had been mice, some frogs; many were now but halves of either, and otherwise so mutilated as to be unrecognizable.

In one hand the man held a narrow knife with an edge like a razor, in the other a long steel forceps. All his powers engrossed, jaws set, eyes strained, and muttering at intervals, he plunged his forceps with a sort of eager greed into the bowl, and closing its steel limbs upon the body of a frog, brought out this, frantically waving its defenceless members.

Physiologists tell us that frogs become blanched with terror when they find themselves upon the vivisection table, and Mrs. Ferrers now experienced an appalling sense of intelligence so quickened in these hapless creatures as to forewarn them of their doom.

The sight of all this mutilated wreckage was a nightmare; but more even than this to the appalled watcher was the sense of being in the company of one completely callous to the transformation of quaint, interesting creatures, divinely planned, into hideous burlesques, which seemed to writhe in blasphemy against a Creator Who had made—and had made them subject to man.

Recovering her powers, and aflame with indignation, she broke into speech.

"Oh, you brute, you brute! I will go out and tell every one about you. You fiendish, wicked brute!" Her voice was no longer of silver, but of quivering steel.

The man looked up. In an instant he flung down his knife and his forceps, and sprang to his feet. For keen as he was upon his task, now there was one even more to his taste. And now there was that in his eyes

which told her the truth. She was locked in with a madman.

She turned, and dashing past the curtain through the ante-room, flung herself desperately against the door, her hands feeling wildly all over it for lock or handle. There was neither lock nor handle. The whole inner surface was thickly padded to prevent the steel substance from serving as a means of self-injury to a demented inmate.

She was of the highly organized genus of woman, delicate and self-controlled, which finds it difficult to scream. She did not scream now. And when some moments later the madman's arms closed round her in a grip relentless as that of his forceps, she lost all power to scream.

With horrid sounds of clucking exultation, he dragged her back into the larger room, handling her with the preternatural strength of insanity, which made her as no more than a child in his hands.

He set her down abruptly, albeit with care, as though considering her of value. With his practised hands he proceeded to prepare his table. He flung the cage of mice into a corner, whereat they swarmed and squeaked more panic-stricken than before; the bowl of frogs he thrust aside. With a few sweeps of an arm, he cleared the table of its carnage, careless of the blood and foulness he incurred.

A flash of horror showed her that she was now to be his victim—that the table was in course of preparation for her martyrdom. She watched him with bedazed senses, but with a mind acutely clear. Persons of her cleverness and resource do not yield their lives without a struggle.

Over and above a deeply centered incredulity that her brilliant and successful life could have the ruthless ending of the hapless creatures round her, an inherent confidence in her own powers left hope gleaming at the back

of her mind, like light shining through a crevice of escape.

How she had come to be here with the madman was a cause of wonder. She did not suspect design. In such thought as she spared to the subject, she could only suppose that she had been brought in error to the wrong room, or that this was, in fact, Corry's study, into which the madman had by some means found his way.

Believing her dreadful position to have resulted from mischance, she knew that the discovery of her danger must be a mere matter of time—of minutes perhaps. Every moment the madman delayed was a moment to her advantage, therefore.

Fear sometimes paralyzes, but as frequently it nerves the powers. It cleared and nerved her clever brain, making it lucid and flashing as the many-faceted diamond to which Malet had likened it.

She watched him out of eyes no longer beautiful or brilliant, but dull and narrowed from the withdrawal of their light to feed the flame wherein her will was hammering thought to shape on the anvil of reason.

And while she thought, the madman was making his table ready with all expedition.

It was complicated mechanism, bristling with clamp and rope and pulley. He himself had designed it for the purpose for which he was now at last exultantly preparing it. To have it always with him, ready for that moment of moments which had been his craze for years, had been found to be the only way of rendering the lives of his keepers endurable. If humored, however, by possession of his gruesome toy, it was not to have been expected that in the interests of those keepers it should have been allowed to be more than a toy.

And this to his fury he now discovered. For on cutting the bonds of his neat coils of ropes, and so freeing them, he found that when he came to tighten them upon their pulleys they snapped like string. The

discovery caused him to waste time in fiery language and much abuse.

But as Corry had told Malet, his case was one of moral insanity, his reason being cold and sound and able. And detecting the trick played upon him, it was not long before he had so readjusted his ropes, trebling and quadrupling them, that although they would not now so secure the whole body of his victim as to deprive her of all power of movement, they would secure the head and arms and shoulders.

His arrangements being at last complete, he raised himself and faced her. Reason being sound in him, perhaps it apprised him of her exceeding beauty; for he remained for some moments staring at her with his dull, protruding eyes.

Then, all other things seeming trifles beside his obsessing purpose, he came round the table.

She had need of every cell and fiber of her self-control to keep herself from fleeing before him. She summoned her forces however, and rising in her chair, fixed and held him with her eyes, brilliant again and tense with power. He came to a halt some paces from her.

"That is a curious table of yours," she said, in tones of quiet interest. "I have never seen one like it."

He was taken aback by her calmness, knowing reasons which made it phenomenal.

"There has never been one like it," he rejoined. "It is my own invention . . . Come now, I am ready."

Without the flicker of an eyelash, her eyes still holding him, she asked him quietly:

"Where do you wish me to come?"

His prominent eyeballs wavered and fell before her fixed magnetic stare. He showed nonplussed. Then an evasive cunning stole into his face.

"The table is made for taking scientific measurements," he said. "I am a physiologist, and I am tabulating records of the height and breadth and weight of persons."

I shall be obliged if you will lie down on my table for a few minutes—so that I may be able to add yours to my records.”

“I will do so with pleasure,” she assented. “But tell me something more of this. I find it interesting.”

With all her fame for whiteness, it is improbable that any one, before or after, ever saw her quite so blanched as she showed now.

“I have no time to waste,” he answered roughly. “Come now, get upon the table.”

Self-control is a power to reckon with, whether it have been acquired in drawing-rooms or on battle-fields. She took another tack.

She forced a little shiver of disgust.

“The table is dirty—horribly dirty. I should spoil my frock.” She touched her modish skirt. “*Please* clean the table first.”

“That is rubbish!” he retorted, losing his temper. “What are clothes compared with Science?”

She shook her head resolutely.

“Really, I cannot get on such a dirty table. It will take only a few minutes to clean it.”

His face became contorted. His hands went out as though to seize her. Then, perceiving that strategy might serve him better, for a struggle would cause more delay than to humor her, he dropped his hands and stood glaring down at her.

She found power to smile at him, though the smile bore but slight resemblance to her far-famed charm in this respect. She knew her only refuge lay in fooling the madman. She had fooled madmen before—albeit madmen of different type.

Deceived by her apparent sincerity, he snatched out his watch and scowled down at it. His scowl cleared. It was scarcely half-past three, and he was safe from interruption until five, when Dixon would bring tea to him. Without wasting further words upon a vain and

silly woman who in the teeth of an important scientific discovery found room for reflections so paltry, he humored her for his own purposes.

He turned and stalked to an adjoining room.

She suffered a single strangled sigh to escape her. She drew a hand across her eyes, strained by their long fixed gaze into his cruel ones. She glanced about, listening with tense ears for sounds of rescue.

Then she re-nerved herself to fool him again, forcing a smile on the face of whiteness she set toward the door.

He came with water and towels, and in ill-humored haste began to work upon the table.

Keeping up the ruse,

"How could you ask me to lie on such a table," she reproached him, with feigned indignation. "It would have ruined my frock."

He went on sullenly with his cleaning. The water in the basin became of ever deeper hue. His feet, striding to and fro, trampled the writhing mutilations on the floor.

Time passes, and with its passing tasks are finished. The table had been mopped and dried, and yet no sign of rescue had appeared.

He raised himself, again confronting her.

Again he bade her, "Come!"

Fighting for time as for breath,

"We have all the afternoon before us," she observed, smiling hard. "There is no necessity for haste." She added, "You won't hurt me, will you?"

"You won't feel it," he blustered. "I shall put you to sleep first with chloroform. And you'll wake up none the worse."

"Are you sure I . . . shall . . . wake up?"

She was coming to the end of her powers. Her voice was beginning to fail her.

"You'll wake up all right," he answered roughly. "Come, I will waste no more time."



"We . . . have . . . all the afternoon," she reiterated faintly. "No . . . no hurry."

Now her lips trembled. Her aching eyelids flickered and then fell.

In a moment he was master of her.

"Get upon the table!" he shouted brutally; "or I will put you there."

They had come to the last grip. She was trembling violently, but nothing he might say or do to her, having seen the sort of work he did upon the table, would induce her voluntarily to commit herself to it. With his first movement of attack she uttered a sharp, stifled cry, and ran down the room, hoping a last hope that she might gain and shut the gate upon him.

She was not quick enough. The madman's terrible clutch was on her, when there came the sound of a key in a lock; then light, then men, then voices.

And then the madman had sterner business than a woman to engage him.

Malet, leaving the others to deal with her assailant, supported Mrs. Ferrers from that horror-chamber.

Outside in the corridor, Carry was standing, shaking like a leaf, blanched, wan, conscience-stricken, appalled at those latent instincts in her which, suddenly flashing into action, had made a potential murderess of her.

She thrust out a trembling hand and touched her victim. She touched her again, to reassure herself by touch as well as by vision that the unspeakable things her minutes of remorse and fear had conjured had not happened.

"Oh . . . thank God! Thank God!" burst from her white lips. She faltered, "It was all a mistake, a frightful mistake."

Mrs. Ferrers clung to Malet.

"Take me from this dreadful house," she said.

"Are you strong enough to walk?"

"I am strong enough for anything . . . but to remain here."

With the aid of his arm she walked back through the wood. Strength came to her from the air. He did not talk, seeing how she needed all her powers.

Arrived at Travenhoe, she said,

"Never tell any one of this horrible thing. I could not bear to have it talked about."

She would have dropped fainting to the ground, had he not caught and supported her.

He put her in charge of her maid, explaining that she had had a severe fright.

He hurried back to "Roseberry." He could not feel at ease until he knew the madman once more safe behind his door. He was anxious too to learn what Peter thought of all this. If he should ever discover the truth, there would be an end indeed of trust and amity between him and Carry.

He found him excitedly pacing the drawing-room. Carry lay upon a sofa, her face hidden, her body heaving at long intervals.

Corry pounced on Malet.

"How was she? What did she say? Will she ever forgive me?"

Malet told him such news as he had.

"I feel fit to go off my own head," Peter continued. "The only explanation of this frightful business is that Dixon had been drinking, and had left the key in the door and the door unlocked. The key cannot be withdrawn until the door is locked; and although he swears he locked it and gave Carry the key, it seems this is a lie. He never turned up with it at all. Carry thought I was in my study, and was taking Mrs. Ferrers there, but in passing Scown's door, either she slipped in by mistake or he slipped out and dragged her in. When Carry turned round, the poor lady had mysteriously vanished. Carry searched the house, and this caused the

'delay. Dixon must have been drinking. He confessed to a bottle of ale, which is against the rules. Carry wants me to give him another chance, but the risk is too great. He must go at once."

Malet, knowing the truth and knowing the man blameless, likewise pleaded for another chance for him.

Peter was obdurate, however.

"After this, I should never have a minute's peace. How could I trust him again? He has broken the rule of no drink under any circumstances, and he has lied barefacedly. Besides, I found he had given that devil a cageful of mice and some frogs to mangle as he chose. I had strictly forbidden any such thing, of course. It made me sick to see them. The fellow excused himself on the ground that it was the only way to quiet Scown. But I'll see him damned before I'll have such doings in my house."

Carry, on the sofa, heaved convulsively. She raised her head and stole a long, abashed, appealing glance at Malet.

Dixon was replaced on the following day by another keeper.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE BARKING OF THE FOXES

**B**EFORE leaving Travenhoe, Mrs. Ferrers had an interview with Lygon.

Again she had done her best to escape it, but again, master of the situation in his own house, he contrived to corner her. Not this time in the Orangery. She was careful to avoid a retreat which had previously proved false to her.

He tracked her, however, to a palm-house where she had thought to breathe, for some minutes, air that was not sultry with masculine ardors.

His passion was at that phase when men are fierce and stormy, and are liable to be more rude than they are flattering. It is none the less an effective, and in a strong, attractive man, by no means an unflattering development.

On his entrance she turned her beautiful face from a window at which she was sitting.

"Do you really hate me as much as you appear to do?" he questioned savagely.

Her eyes kindling, melting into his, answered mutely, but, it seemed, satisfactorily.

He flung himself into a chair and sighed harshly.

"I never have a word with you. You live surrounded by a crowd. Gad! if you really cared for me, you could not stand this ceaseless frivolling."

"I must play my rôle. We all have parts to play in life, as we have in pageants. Mine is to be a popular beauty. If you knew how little it really pleases me, I think you would be satisfied."

His passionate eyes devoured her.

"Vanna, I have your promise," he said hoarsely. "I am staking my all on that promise," his voice dropped, "—on that last week in January."

He sighed again harshly.

"—Three weeks still," he added. "And I have waited years."

She rose and, moving up to him, laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"What are three weeks, Morant?" A faint echo of his sigh escaped her. "Three weeks, and then—the Deluge! After that I come down from my throne. I——" She broke off, shuddering delicately.

"—After that," she resumed, "I cease to be a popular idol: I become the tame wife of a tyrant who will strangle any man who looks at me."

From where her hand rested lightly on his shoulder, tremors generated and coursed through him. He was wellnigh beside himself to take her in his arms and hold her passionately.

But he feared to loose the rein upon himself, lest passion run away with him. At any moment somebody might come. And it was part of their plan and a guerdon of his homage for her, that when the climax should come none should be able to tell of previous love-passages between them.

Openly in the face of the world, they would do what they would do, shaping their course, not in weakness, but in strength, and—so far as this were possible—in honor.

"I promise to be no such Blue-Beard," he said tensely.

Then Cyril, running in, put a stop to further confidences.

Lygon deliberated long the question whether he would himself warn Monica of his intention. This seemed to him to be the straight and honorable thing to do, and due from him to her. To do it would give him an op-

portunity of expressing the new regard he had come to feel for her, as likewise of showing her the compunction he was experiencing in the matter. The inevitability of such a passion as he felt for Mrs. Ferrers, and the belief that she herself had never loved him, were the only pleas he had to offer for his conduct.

These good resolutions, however, had merely paved the way of that descent to which the days were bringing him. The morning of his departure for Egypt came, and she was yet untold. He had made all his arrangements: such additions to his kit as their intended stay in Egypt necessitated; letters of instruction to his agent, his lawyer, and others, lay in a despatch-box, the key of which was to be inclosed in his farewell letter to his wife when he should leave.

To say that as the day approached he had been merely a happy and exultant lover would be to say that which was far from being the truth. He was torn by many feelings, not the least of which was that new sentiment he had developed for his wife.

Needs must, however, when a great passion drives. There are few or no considerations which will keep the scale from tossing high, when such a passion lies in the other.

He slept scarcely at all, and came down on this momentous morning hot-eyed and unrefreshed. Monica breakfasting always in her room, her presence was not added to his discomposure.

"Did any of you hear foxes barking round the house last night?" he asked the butler waiting on him.

Gibbs glanced up, a shade of curiosity lightening his grave respectfulness.

"Yes, my lord," he said. "They've been heard these three nights by several. I heard them myself, my lord."

"Queer thing! I don't remember to have heard them here before."

"No, my lord," Gibbs said. He added, without hint in his voice of the significance his own and the superstitions of the household had read into the fact: "No foxes have been heard barking, my lord, since the night before your lordship's father died. And it's said, my lord, they hadn't been heard then since your lordship's grandfather died."

"Ah!" Lygon commented carelessly.

Now that they were recalled to him, he remembered the facts. He remembered, too, an old family tradition. He was not superstitious, but the recollection impressed him disagreeably. He grasped his disagreeable impression with a firm hand, reflecting cynically that the barking could have no connection this time with the fortunes of the Lygons, since it was highly improbable that Reynard was concerning himself with their morals, although it seemed he had done so with their decease.

Monica came in presently, her face white, her dark eyes deeply circled. It seemed that she too had scarcely slept, had heard foxes barking, and moreover had dreamed distressingly—had dreamed of Cyril. She had ordered a motor, she said, intending to drive over to Eton to see for herself that the boy was well.

His first reflection was that in this case she would be absent at the hour arranged for his departure. He had told her the evening before that he was leaving for Town on the following day. His next impression was a sense of grudge against her, such as men feel toward those they injure.

"You trouble needlessly about the boy," he said impatiently. "He is all right."

She could not understand his sudden irritation. She answered quietly.

"I must see for myself."

An hour later she sought him with an opened telegram. Her pallor and the circles round her eyes were grievous.

"Cyril is ill, Morant," she said in a low voice. "I am motoring over at once. Will you not come too?"

At the moment he was writing—and writing with difficulty—his farewell letter to her. Had she had thought to spare for him, she must have remarked the abashed face he raised to her when he had set his blotter upon the half-written page.

While he was writing, that sense of injury against her had been strong. After all those years of aloofness and hard pride which had been as iron gates betwixt them, and which, remaining, would have made this step of his so infinitely easier, it showed as mere perversity on her part so to have changed and softened to him that his abandonment of her now presented itself as the mean betrayal of one who trusted him.

"*Cyril is ill. Please come,*" the message ran. The name of Cyril's house-master followed.

"No, there's no need for me to go," he said shortly. "And for goodness' sake, don't be anxious, Monica. It is nothing worse than whooping-cough or measles, you will find."

"He has had both," she said—not disputatiously, but with a break in her voice.

Her eyes reproached him as she turned away.

"Send me a wire, of course," he said, "if the little chap is really ill. But depend on it, there is nothing seriously wrong with him—a fine, healthy chap like that!"

When she had left him he consulted his watch, however. It would be only decent of him to run over with her, and have a look at the boy. But the hour warned him that there was not time for him to go, if he would, as he must, do a number of things still required to set his house in order before finally deserting it. He put back his watch in his pocket, and read over his half-written letter.

He tore it up and wrote another, this time without



halting or deliberation, but with a swiftly running pen. For all at once he saw that it was of no significance what he should say. His action was the thing that mattered, and this was already decided. He sealed and put the letter in his pocket to be handed to Gibbs at the last moment.

He lunched in a fit of gloom, and went out immediately after to see his agent about something he had omitted to tell him. He was all the while surprised and angry with himself that he had not been able to submerge the conscience-stricken husband in the exultant lover.

He returned soon after three. Gibbs was waiting for him on the steps, a telegram in hand. His face was grave. The talk in the servants' hall had run all the morning on the barking foxes.

The telegram said, "*Come. Monica.*"

Now he was alarmed indeed.

He ordered a motor to be brought round at once. And while he waited for it he foresaw that his longer and more fateful journey would need to be postponed.

Now the lover flamed up in him, and the realization was made with a sense of strangling. After so long, to have to wait still longer? He felt a swirl of senseless anger against the boy for having fallen ill so inopportunistically. It lasted no more than an instant, however. The next his affectionate solicitude had routed it. Poor chap! poor dear little chap! He hoped he was not really bad.

But as he drove, half way down the drive there came from a near covert a gruff flat bark which made his blood stand still.

At the door of Cyril's house, the servant, questioned how the boy was, shook his head in solemn silence.

The father turned to stone. He found no voice to question further.

Upstairs, the man opened the door of a room at the end of a long gallery—opened it without knocking, and ushered him in without word.

A room of darkness and of stillness so profound as to make it seem that Life itself had come to a full stop before the piteous truth.

Lygon, entering from the outer daylight and bedazed by shock and dread, made out nothing in the darkness but the thunder of his heart. Then a breeze blowing through an opened window blew aside the drawn blind. And the darkness gave up its dead.

A simple room, too straight and orderly to be the chamber of a living, active boy; the chairs in it, the things upon the little dressing-table, the towels on the rack, and a row of boots against a wall, all set so prim and soberly as to seem that they had been set in preparation for that final Judgment Day when all things shall be required to return to their appointed order.

In the middle of the death-chamber a cold white bed, fearsome in its rigid lines and frozen immobility, without a curve of life or crumple of it showing on the sheeted surface. And lying in it, straight and light and strangely long and preternaturally still, a quiet outline, elbows bent, hands clasped upon his breast, as never warm and living boy disposed his hands.

Above them, rising from the open collar of his shirt, like a fair flower lifting from its calyx, lay the beautiful calm face, with chaste white brows and finely chiseled features, a face of tinted alabaster with the cold blood painting the cheeks, and framed by the rich dark hair with a kink in it. The noble head was outlined as in snow upon the quiet pillow, the waxen mouth was set in the mysterious faint smile of dreaming boyhood.

They had put a bunch of lilies in his marble hands, and he lay there clasping them, unheeding them, sleeping and dreaming and smiling mysteriously.

For Death had turned his key in the door of Life, and the spirit was locked out forever from the beautiful young body that had been its temple. But the temple windows—the dropped lids and smiling mouth—were aglow still, and rapt with the wonder of the young passing.

He moved across the room and stood beside the bed, his mind incredulous, yet knowing in his heart, taught by the check of his chilled blood in this a frozen runlet of it, that the transfigured flesh before him was all that Death had left to him of Cyril.

Never again would the boy dance up to him with glancing eyes of filial affection, never again grip his hands in fond young pulsing fingers, never be proud of his father again as Master of Hounds, nor be proud of himself as the son of the Master of Hounds, who, young as he was, had ridden with the best of them. He choked, remembering how the little fellow's eyes had shone and turned to him once when the Hunt had cheered him for a long and plucky run.

All that he had thought for him, had wished for him, had thought to do for him, his pride and joy in him and fondness, came swirling back upon him like a strong tide violently stemmed. The flower-like life had been plucked up by the roots, and cast upon this bed, to lie there senseless as the lilies at his breast, for those brief hours before it was returned, complex and transfigured earth, to Mother-earth.

And presently, across it like a bar sinister, across the stainless body of his son, across his tender memories of him, began to creep the recollection of his plotted treason; and then a sudden realization of how little—God forgive him!—this beautiful dead boy had been to him beside the woman. It smote him as unutterably shocking—a remorseless irony of fate—that, on this very day on which his father was to have betrayed him, the

boy had been fighting his young battle with Death—and, losing it, his bright young soul had floated out across the Bar.

With a groan he dropped to his knees beside the bed, and buried his face in his hands.

A slight sound roused him. He looked up, to see a mournful shadow detach itself from the dusk of a recess in which it had been lost. Monica, of course! For the moment he had forgotten Monica.

She approached, and stood on the opposite side of the bed.

"Morant, it cannot be true," she said, in a hollow voice. "Wake me! for pity's sake, wake me from this dreadful dream!"

He rose and put an arm about her, drawing her to him compassionately.

"Poor Monica!" he said. "Poor Monica!"

She shuddered, and awoke. The terrible dream was a terrible truth.

Her soul, distraught, had wrenched itself asunder from her body, and, parting the veil, had forced its way across the borderland, desperately seeking at the entrance to the Valley a boy but lately come there—a handsome boy with fearless eyes and supple limbs, and a heart like a singing-bird for joy in living; a boy all energy and health and laughter; one who leapt and ran; a boy of twelve, who belonged to his mother and to Life; one in whom Death had no sort of part.

*Had no one seen him? He had but strayed in error through the gates—a boy's mistake, a heedless boy, daring even Death to find adventure. Some one must have seen him! He must be here—just close within the gates. It was but minutes since he wandered over from the other side. And she had come on flying feet to take him back.*

*Had he gone this way or that?*

*Oh, God help her! God help her! and show her the way he had gone that she might find and take him back! He was but a boy, God; a schoolboy of twelve; and, for all his bravery, the dark and loneliness would frighten him.*

*Why do they not speak, these Shapes and Shadows? They raise their heads and look with spectral eyes. They draw their misty garments round them. The darkness deepens. . . . Down the Valley chill winds blow . . . twisting glimpses come of fearsome things God! how the boy will be afraid! God, of Thy Infinite Mercy, show me the way quickly that I may quickly come to him and comfort him! For I am his mother, God! and I have nothing else in all the world.*

*No Sound! No Light! . . . . . No Aid!*

*Is there no pity in Omnipotence that you tear my Cyril from me? . . . Infinite Mercy! Oh, if he must . . . if he must—then take me also! Infinite, Infinite Mercy! Strip me of life and of flesh, that I may go to him! Quick, then, O Kind One! Strike Thou Swift and Sure, that I may find my boy before he pass too far.*

Thus the sharp sword of her grief had rent the Veil, suffering her to grope amid the shadows on the Threshold. Thus, distraught and anguished, she had spent the hours, praying, pleading, interceding.

But the Great Immutable Smiled on and Granted nothing, knowing the Great Plan Good, and that no tittle of the law shall pass away till all have been fulfilled.

The coming of her husband, her last link with life, withdrew her back to it. Out of her frenzy of hope she awoke to more desperate hopelessness.

"Morant," she said faintly, "I have been to look for . . . him. But . . . he had gone too far . . . I could not find him."

At first he did not understand, his man's wits failing

to plumb the deeps of mother-love. But soon her spectral voice, her eyes all quenched of light, her death-cold hands, her leaden weight, told him the whole truth. She had been within the Gates, swept across the borderland on winds of grief and yearning; had been and had returned to him, back from the jaws of Death.

For all his faults, he was a strong and tender man. He took her in his arms and, moving to a chair, sat down and held her gently. She lay against him, shattered, heeding nothing, scarcely breathing, the while her spirit, all but torn from her body, slowly and feebly relinked itself with limb and faculty. Realizing all she must have suffered to have brought her to this pass, he cursed his selfishness which had left her to face it alone, to meet the whole brunt of the shock, unbefriended.

And again he gleaned new knowledge of her. First he had believed her cold and hard, then he had believed her passionless and self-sufficing. Now he saw her so distraught by feeling as to be more dead than living.

Strength returning to her,

"Were you in time?" he whispered, as though fearing to waken the sleeper.

Her head against his shoulder motioned "No!"

"I was just . . . too late."

His mind was full of questions. How could this strong and healthy boy have died so suddenly that there had been scarcely time to warn his friends that he was ill? He would not grieve her with questions, but presently a few leaden words dropped from her white lips.

"He had been running. . . . He wished to do well in the Sports. . . . Something was ruptured in the heart. . . . He died almost at once."

Lygon's grief was supplemented now by anger. Some one must have been grossly to blame. It was monstrous that a splendid chap like this should have been allowed to kill himself by over-training. Somebody should hear of it! he determined savagely.

It appeared that nobody was to blame, however. Cyril had transgressed rules in training on his own account. The prescribed training strained the boys to the utmost of their young powers. A little more, and the thread snapped.

They buried him at Travenhoe.

Lygon would never forget Monica's eyes as they lowered the long light narrow coffin into the grave.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### MONICA'S GRIEF

A MONTH had passed. The Lygons were still at Travenhoe. Monica had now another tie to bind her there. It was here that the boy and she had spent their happiest days. The place was charged with tender memories, exquisite and poignant. It was here that the beautiful young body which had taken life from her lay, peacefully resolving itself into its elements.

Lygon had not left her, could not leave her. She went about like a ghost, mute and white and stricken.

He went dark and brooding. For with the blunting by time of the sharp edge of grief, his passion began to reassert itself. Greatly as he had loved his boy and profoundly as he mourned him, a strong man's life is not of the stuff that can dwell in a child's grave. And with time, his heart began to thunder again for Vanna.

To his letter apprising her of the fatality and—between the lines—of the frustration of their plans, she had written sincerely and with feeling.

The affair between them was at a standstill. With Monica's ghost-face and quenched eyes before him, Lygon did his best to stifle his desires. This was no time to make further plans against her.

He saw from the effect upon her of the boy's death how her whole soul had been bound up in him. He had thought her incapable of passion. Yet her love for the boy had been such a passion as, transformed into a grief, was, flame-like, consuming her.

It moved him to find that, in her broken and bereft



state, she came to him for comfort. It seemed that she could not suffer to be alone. Doubtless solitude had poignant memories, he reflected pitifully.

For the first time in their life together, she would bring her book or work to a room where he was, and would sit there, as though his presence helped her. She did not speak nor seek attention, but only sat there with a lost detached air, like some poor shadow that had wandered in to warm itself beside a human heart.

It shocked him to see her like this, so meek and broken, where she had been so proud and self-contained. There was a mute appeal in her eyes; she smiled wistfully at him, as though praying him to bear with her.

After a phase of abandonment to grief, she resumed her customary life, fulfilling her duties, writing her letters, and administering her household as before. But all that she did, she did mechanically, leadenly, as though it were a painful effort.

He wished her to go away for change of air and scene, but the suggestion agitated her. She clung here, where memories of her dead were freshest and most sweet. She spoke little of their loss, and when she did so, spoke with calmness and control. Her evident belief that thus she hid her pain was pitiful.

After the first week he did not see her weep. Yet worse than to see her weep it was to find her follow him from room to room dependently and brokenly, like that poor shadow drawn to warm itself in human company. It might have tried the patience of a man less kind. But he had no thought now for her that was not kind. He was persuaded that she thus sought him because he was her boy's father. The thought moved him strangely. Her weakness stirred his manhood, her dependence his chivalry, her fortitude his pitiful regard. For he saw that her muteness and meekness were the outcome of fortitude—spent states resultant on a perpetual battle between her courage and her grief.

She insisted that she was well. She negated every suggestion that she needed care. He saw that she was striving hard to mask, and believed herself successful in hiding her grief. She did not guess how tragic was the mask.

Withdrawn into herself, she abandoned her defences. For the first time he began to see her as she was, for the first time realized that true and delicate quality Malet had discovered in her, the tender womanhood which was the keynote of her nature.

He had always realized her as beautiful and good and clever, but she had had no charm for him. There was a quality in her that kept men at bay. She was difficult—to some impossible—of approach. Some who had known her all her life had failed to penetrate beyond the ante-room of her personality. Friendly and gracious-mannered, there was yet a zone of snow about her inner self which left one baffled as to what—if anything—were within it.

The husband of her girlhood, he had mistaken this snow-zone for the pole of her, and had been chilled and alienated. He believed her to be, as so many persons were, sexually immature, never suspecting that within the snow-zone, and safeguarded by it, lay a region of exquisite warmth and tenderness, an enchanted region to which one alone might come.

With some women sex is an attribute crude and shallow, skin-deep only, flaunted in eye, on cheek and lip. All that there is of it is set in the shop-window, and some observers take the exhibited wares for proof of richer store. Yet it is with this as with some other things in life. Only the cheaper and inferior shops make a great display in the windows; it is in those which show but a ribbon here and a flower there, where are found the most exquisite confections.

The woman who wears her sex upon her sleeve, pinned there like an artificial flower, is one in whom neither

love is nor refreshment, nor sweetness nor tenderness, nor any other of the finer attributes of sex-emotion. True women, like Nature, defend the poles of their being by a zone of ice.

Monica was more than ordinarily reserved, and in her unsophistication, ignorant that soul-possession is the highest rite of physical possession, she had repulsed him, taking refuge behind her white defences.

What he had learned of women previously had unfitted him to deal with an innocent and delicate young creature, who knew as little of herself as she knew of men.

Accordingly, impetuous and ardent of temperament, stall-fed in the house of life, he had soon lost patience with a shyness which had seemed to him to border on stupidity, to show as a constitutional defect.

Now, however, with her changed demeanor and with the last surrender of her defences, he first saw beyond the zone of snow—found there a tender woman's heart, devoted, warm, and true.

The discovery not only amazed and perplexed, but it mortified him. Man of the world as he was, he saw himself clumsy and crude in his long misconception of her. For twelve whole years he had lived beside this rare and complex woman, for months in the close bond of marriage, and yet had known as little of her as might any casual acquaintance; less even, for such a casual acquaintance would possibly not have misjudged her as he had done.

It has been wittily said that "*The men who love Woman seldom love women; the men who love women seldom love Woman.*"

It is equally true that the men who know women may know nothing of Woman, but only the men who know Woman know anything of women.

One of the reasons why misconceptions concerning the sex are so rife is because the great majority of persons do not distinguish between Woman and women, do not

realize that there are many feminine creatures wholly lacking in the attributes of Woman. Such woman-qualities as they possess are the defects mainly.

It seems an anomaly that the coming of the other woman should have supplied him with the key by which to read his wife's character. This is what happened, however. His passion for Mrs. Ferrers, who was so pre-eminently fashioned to arouse great issues, had been the first great emotion of his life.

Every man's character is mined with possibilities, it needs but the fuse to create explosion and upheaval. And when the fume and the débris have settled (unless utter wreckage ensue), it will be found that new space has been made for the really effective movement of the powers.

Such had occurred in Lygon as an outcome of his great passion. And this had made room in him for that higher and wider comprehension of Woman and of her essential attributes, which is the beginning of all wisdom. For Woman is at the same time the mainspring of the Race and the agency of Evolution, although *women* are too frequently the implements of their frustration!

Monica's dependence on him woke in Lygon such a tenderness and chivalry as he had never felt before.

It was so long, however, since marks of affection had passed between them, that even now, in their bond of grief, any demonstration would have embarrassed and mortified both. They were more strangers than strangers are, being estranged. But her mute forlornness brokenly prayed his sympathy, and this his manhood yielded and his compassionate mien conveyed. For the first time for many years he drove out with her. Shocked by her pallor and wasting, he had ordered a carriage to be brought round one afternoon. She seemed to have lost all thought to make plans for herself.

He asked her to be ready, telling her that a drive would benefit her.

"I am quite well," she had answered listlessly.

He went out upon the steps to see her start. She looked so frail in her melancholy black, and her eyes dwelled so wistfully upon him, that he had no heart to let her go alone.

"I will go, too," he said cheerfully, although with some awkwardness. "I have nothing to do this afternoon."

Light came to her face.

They drove almost in silence, finding nothing to say to one another. On the following day, however, when the carriage came again, her eyes pleaded, and he had again accompanied her. Thus a habit was formed. And although they found little to say to one another, the habit wore down the hard ridges of estrangement.

At the end of a month, business and some engagements took him for a few days to Town. Her haunting eyes went with him, and brought him back earlier than he had intended.

Side by side with his new tenderness for her, his love for Mrs. Ferrers smoldered still, a pent-up fire. And though he refrained sternly from making plans at this juncture, he had nevertheless an undercurrent sense of drifting toward the inevitable. While her grief was in the green, let him do what he could to ease it, however.

He was glad on his return that he had not left her longer alone. For when none had been there before whom to wear her mask, the harassing obligations to eat and to drive and to sleep had no longer constrained her, and in so far as was compatible with sheer existence, she had left these unfulfilled. Had he not now fed crumbs of emotional sustenance to her she must have died.

For heaped upon her miseries was the knowledge, by love's divination, of Lygon's intended abandonment. It

was strange, she thought, that he should think to hide the truth from her. In her stunned state she felt like one whose child and husband both had died. They had taken away her dead body, and for a space it was left to her to watch beside her dead love.

It was this sense of a last vigil before he too should be taken, which made her follow him mutely from room to room, and bring her book and seem to read, that she might sit with him for so long as he was left to her.

Then she began to pick up strength, to recover her normal states of mind and body. And with her recovering powers, she clung, poignantly, to the new kind of relation between them.

He still drove with her. She sat beside him, conscious of him as a girl of her first lover. Sometimes she clutched desperately at a frail hope that this dear friendship might be left to her who was already so bereft.

Friendship does not suffice with a strong man whose blood surges for love, however. And theirs came to a violent end.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### LYGON'S PROPOSAL

**D**URING the period following on their loss, among other discoveries Lygon made about his wife, was the changed aspect which his realization of her devoted nature set upon the nun-like years to which he had condemned her. While he had believed her immature and cold, these had caused him no uneasiness. The nun-life was her natural destiny.

Now, however, discovering the rich wealth of feeling in her, he realized that although she had seemed content to lavish this upon her boy, it might well have had a lover for its object. He reflected, with a shock to his conscience, that had she taken a lover as did so many women whose husbands neglected them—or for that matter so many whose husbands did not—he himself would not only have been to blame, but further, he could not justly have blamed her.

Nature ruled that love was as much a need and a due of hearts as food and air were of bodies.

He knew her too proud and too true for a secret intrigue. But he was smitten by a gust of anger, reflecting that if she had not done this it was no evidence at all that she did not love some other man. The thought rankled, and continued to rankle. Without himself loving her, he yet hotly wished to be assured she loved no other man.

Upon the eve of losing her, he saw her as a woman preëminently to be desired as wife and mother of one's children. All the men of their circle regarded her highly. Some of their men-friends were sincerely at-

tached to her—so much so as to be scrupulous not to make love to her.

And what a mother she had been to Cyril, so strong and wise and tender! And what a boy had Cyril been! His heart swelled when he reflected on the ruthless sacrifice of his young life.

A doctor with whom he had talked had told him that athletics took a yearly toll of life or of health. An ever-increasing number of medical men, he had said, believed that all boys suffered constitutional deterioration from the strain of strenuous games which were the rule of schools.

He himself considered that not only health and constitution suffered, but that intelligence and individuality were stunted by keeping the young mind perpetually at drill, either upon books or in so-called games—which were not relaxation at all, but a stultifying cramping of the powers in narrow rule and regulation.

It was frequently the finest who were cut off, he had said. Inferior types adapted themselves to degenerative conditions, where finer types succumbed. You could grow dandelions where roses would die, because higher organisms demanded higher conditions for their nurture and development.

He fell to wishing fervently that he possessed half a dozen such boys as his had been. It was a crime that such a mother, one endowed with such a gift of motherhood, should have had but one child. He thought upon the commonplace or sickly children of his friends, and perceived in a flash that Monica's motherhood had been genius—the very highest form of Creative Art, an art which continued to perpetuate its noble images æons after every other mortal work had gone to dust.

And he had now no son! No heir!

To every manly, thinking man, childlessness is abhorrent, a racial death which he feels as a form of personal death. Lygon felt this now—no son of his



flesh, no heir of his house, none to succeed to the old title and possessions save the derelict, Vernon.

He sat feeling dull and flat. What a thing was a man! He must have this and that—and still want more. And yet—was it fair, ye gods, to bait the trap with such a lure? How could he, being mortal, do anything but crave this Vanna-woman with all his mortal body and immortal soul?

And yet how ugly, ruthless was it, since his way to her lay over the heart of this sorrowing mother, striking his man's fist into her piteous face.

In the course of time he sat down and wrote a letter. It took him long to write it—longer than it had taken him to write that letter to Monica on the morning of their boy's death, a letter which had never been delivered.

When he had written it, he walked to Foxgate and registered it at the general post office. He did not return till late at night.

Monica waited dinner for him two whole hours. She came out into the hall on hearing his voice. He saw that she was trembling. No doubt, in her nervous state, she had conjured up some accident, he reflected.

"Dinner?" he repeated, rather testily. "No, I'm a bit out of sorts. I've been tramping it off."

It seemed to take some days of "tramping off." She begged him to consult a doctor. He scoffed. For a touch of liver?

Chancing to come down early a few mornings afterward, she found a sheaf of letters heaped beside his plate. And on the top was one addressed in Mrs. Ferrers' clear caligraphy.

Her heart drummed in her ears. At last—at last! Now God befriend her! This was the meaning of his altered looks—of his long trappings. Would he go to-day? Ah, not to-day! Let her but keep him one day longer!

When presently he came, he showed no haste to open the letter.

She avoided looking at him while he read it, but she gathered that it was brief, that one side only of the paper was written on. He refolded and, putting it back into its envelope, slipped it into his breast-pocket.

When her eyes went to his face it told her nothing.

She spent the morning with the sense of one driven to the verge of a gulf, into which she dared not look.

He came in to tea, fagged and tired. Some business of the Hunt had kept him. He spoke cheerfully, told of little incidents of the day, meetings with friends, scraps of gossip they had imparted.

Tea over, he became suddenly grave.

All at once he rose, and going round to the back of her chair, took up his stand behind her.

He said quietly :

"Monica, I have something to say to you, something to propose. Are you listening?"

She answered "Yes," as steadily as she was able. For she had turned suddenly faint. It would be like an executioner elaborately explaining his methods before lopping off one's head!

After a pause he asked :

"Is there any reason why you and I should not take up our life together where we dropped it years ago?"

He waited for her answer. She was far too amazed to frame a reply, however.

"I scarcely know why we dropped it," he went on. "We have really never quarreled seriously. It was my doing, of course. I got a notion that you did not like me—that you disliked me, in fact. We seemed somehow to be incompatible. But of late we have come to understand one another better, to be better friends. Couldn't we have another shot at being something"—a sigh cut his voice—"something better still?"

He waited again for her to help him out. But again

she did not speak. With that preconceived notion that he was about to acquaint her with his projected desertion, her thoughts needed forcible readjustment to this wholly unexpected turn of things.

Checked by her silence and passivity, which, if not the outcome of repugnance, showed her at all events reluctant to acquiesce in his proposal, he said with a terseness which told that he was now on the crux of the thing:

"We have no child, no boy to inherit. It would be monstrous for Vernon to succeed. Monica, I am your husband, you my wife. Let us be friends again, husband and wife again in more than name. Will you not come with me to Cannes? It is years since we have been together at the Villa. It is a charming place. The change would do you good. Let us go there as soon as you can be ready—go there and take up our life where we dropped it years ago."

No doubt he was tired by his trampings, even more by the mental battles which had attended them. Doubtless he felt, too, that this calculated reunion would be but a spiritless substitute for his passionate dream.

At all events, the proposal sounded in her ears so bald and coldly plotted that she repudiated it outright.

Now she spoke, and spoke with a force which had been gathering during her silence.

"No, no!" she cried vehemently. "Only love—nothing but love sanctions the terms of love. In cold blood and calculation—how could I? You do not love me. How can I help knowing the truth? And knowing it, I cannot bear that you should make such a proposal."

"Of course," he stated firmly, "I have a right to ask it of you. You have nothing against me. It is not just of you, to say the least of it, to decline to live with me, to deny me my right to children, my right to an heir."

Once she had been too hot and too proud to have discussed with him a theme so intimate in a vein so

repugnant to her. But grief and their kinder relations had tempered her pride.

"Do you not see," she said, "how crude it is to make a matter of arrangement of what should be an impulse of love only?"

There was a long silence. Then his voice said, dulcet in her ear:

"Monica, you loved the boy so, it would comfort you to have another fine little chap or a sweet, pretty little girl to be fond of."

She buried her face in her hands.

"Morant—don't!" she cried.

But the voice, more dulcet still, went on:

"The house seems wrong, no luck about it, without a child in it. Have you forgotten what Cyril was to us, how we looked for the dear chap to run in with his laugh and his talk, how proud we were of him, how he rode his pony with the best, how——"

She cried out, anguished:

"Oh, you break my heart!"

"Let me heal it for you. A woman like you needs children to be fond of. And we have come to understand one another so much better. We might make a better thing of our life than we knew how to do before. Young people are fools. They don't know the values of things. Come, Monica, let us give ourselves another chance. Let me wire Marston to prepare the Villa for us. Will Thursday be too soon for you to start?"

Her love and yearning conjured visions. These new rich tones of suasion in his voice dropped honey on her starved heart; she felt his warm and virile breath upon her cheek. It was temptation, nevertheless, such as a woman might feel at the sight of jewels belonging to another; though she may covet, she does not think to appropriate them.

By this time she knew enough of men to realize that their code of life, although more consistent and in the

long run perhaps better sustained than is that of women, is nevertheless framed in lower terms.

It shocked her, nevertheless, to believe him guilty of a plot so crude as that of deliberately securing an heir before deserting her.

Because of their highly specialized differences of nature, men and women must always be more or less enigmas to one another. Men, knowing women to be higher of caliber than themselves, frequently believe them to be higher than they are. Women, knowing men to be of cruder caliber than themselves, frequently believe them to be cruder than they are.

Lygon, a man of honor and refinement, was quite incapable of the coarse intention she imputed to him.

When, therefore, having so surrendered his pride as to plead with her, she lifted her face out of her hands to say with a finality about which there could be no mistake:

"Never ask me again, I entreat you," he rejoined, in a curt, mortified voice:

"Oh, very well! As you please."

He turned, and stalked to the door.

She sprang up and ran down the beautiful room in pursuit of him. At the door she caught him by an arm. For something in his atmosphere, one of those incalculable flashes that reveal the minds of others to us, had told her she was misjudging him. Yet again she misconceived his intention, although now her error did him less injury.

Now she thought his plan was for her sake; that, not to leave her wholly desolate, he had had a generous impulse to leave her with her grief assuaged by mother-hope. The recognition in him, as he turned away, of a generous impulse repudiated, was unmistakable.

She said impulsively:

"Don't be vexed, Morant. You have been so good to me. Be kind a little longer." She added low: "But,

love is so sacred, that I think we should not turn it to other uses than its own beautiful fulfillment."

The eyes she raised to him were wet and shining. In them was a sorrow-stricken look that filled him with compunction, and in them were a truth and sweetness he had never seen in any woman's eyes.

He stood regarding her with new surprise—how she was surprising him at every turn! Then his anger and mortification gave place to a fine gravity and understanding.

He put out a hand, and just touched her warm, dark hair.

"You seem to know a good deal about love, Monica," he said, "for so cold a woman."

He left her, and sat pondering these subtleties.

And ever and again the reflection forced itself that she had beautiful eyes, truly beautiful eyes, liquid and tender and dark, the haunt it seemed of shy, wild, lovely feelings, that took flight at a glance, but left the gazer hot all over for pursuit.

And she was his wife!

And yet, though his wife, he had never come up with these exquisite haunting emotions.

A hobby of Lygon's was the microscope. The serious side of him found a never waning fascination in the marvel of the things that lie within things.

Here was a smear upon a slide, no more than a dirt-smudge apparently, and yet the lens showed in it depth on depth of order and beauty and meaning.

The thought returned with a personal application. Monica's eyes, as he had seen them, had been shining lenses, all at once revealing depth on depth. She was mysterious, calm, and reposeful, yet profoundly vital, seldom exploiting her powers, yet subtly impressing them, diffusing peace, diffusing sweetness like a delicate fragrance.

He had remarked of late that when she quitted a room, there was a sudden sense of loss, as though with her had gone some warm, inspiring effluence. Was this new in her? he asked himself. Or had she been always thus, while he had been insensible to these more delicate issues?

Moods of pique and mortification came. Fine man that he was, and attractive to women, it stung him that his wife should be so insusceptible to him as she appeared to be.

It put him on his mettle. Could one not ruffle that proud calm of hers, raise storm in her mysterious deeps?

He began to take pains to please her, with no definite plan of re-winning her, however. That, in the face of the aversion she had shown, he thought was hopeless.

But the sense that she misjudged him, undervalued him, made him, since he had come to find new values in her, desire to show some values also in her sight. He was piqued to show her, too, that she missed something in repulsing him.

Insidiously he plied some proven weapons of attack—looks, tones, movements, an ironic bent of speech; sought her in his best minutes, when he had come in from riding, his fine frame set off by his riding kit, his eyes keen and kindled, his blood pulsing from the invigoration of strong exercise.

She was a woman, and, as he now knew, a supremely emotional one. In a soft mood she should find him desirable, as other women seemed to do; should see that what she lightly cast aside was not so slight a thing as she might think.

He took his toll not once nor twice, but many times. For, alas, how desirable she found him! How the blood stormed at her heart, her breath caught in her throat, when he came to her thus, flushed from his ride, his blue eyes ardent, his manhood quickened, his whole being radiating power! How when at dinner he told her some

new bit of gossip, some social or political happening, his ironic gift characterizing his story—how the magic of him sent her pulses pattering through her like soft, sweet rain-showers breaking up a frost! Alas, what cruelty to spur and whip her all-too-willing heart!

In intervals of plying these his weapons—unconsciously, as she believed—she saw him in moods of blank depression or of fierce despair; saw him sit with dull and introspective eyes and grim mouth. For having burnt his ships behind him—ships that had been standing out toward a dazzling horizon—he was now warned off the quiet haven wherein he had been led to hope for harbor.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### MRS. FERRERS AT HOME

MRS. FERRERS sat in the charming boudoir of her charming house in Park Lane.

The house was, within and without, perhaps the most delectable of all the houses in that modish thoroughfare. It was too small to show like the latest acquisition of some ostentatious new arrival from the murky land of Pluto. It was too large to appear like a wayside shrine of Venus, half hiding itself among its accredited neighbors, demure and coquettish, behind a foam of white-laced blinds and a profusion of flowers, for just so long as some gay little vampire of a *demi-mondaine* should suck her ephemeral bat-like existence from the purse and senses of her latest victim.

Mrs. Ferrers had a subtle taste; there was distinction in all that belonged to her. Walking up or down the Lane, her house, before any other, arrested the eye and gratified the sense. It was painted white. There are many tones of white, and many houses painted in these many tones, but the white of hers was preëminently the right one, and once seen, showed the others to be wrong.

There was lace upon her blinds, and her curtains were of lace, but the lace was of the finest, and there was only just enough of it. Window-boxes, too, there were at every window, but the note of profusion was delicately avoided.

Persons came from far and near to see the house of Mrs. Ferrers, and having seen it went away content, and, in some occult fashion, convinced that all they had heard

of her as the most fascinating woman of her century was true. So did she set the seal of the unique on her possessions.

Within, the house exhibited a similar distinction. No other house was like it, and having known this, the unlikeness to this was seen to be a defect on the part of those others.

The boudoir in which she now sat on this morning in May—the third week of May, for she came late to Town and had only just arrived—was upholstered in white velvet; like the paint outside, just the right tone of white, yet not at all like it. Such color as there was was borrowed from and varied by the flowers in it, and by the clothes of its occupant.

To-day the flowers were heliotrope, and she was wearing gray, a robe so elusive of tint and so filmy of texture that it seemed to wreath her delicately, as she moved, in a faint cloud of smoke.

She was alone, but her air was expectant. Once she rose from her white velvet chair and, crossing the room, took up and glanced through a letter lying on a writing-table, as though to confirm her recollection of an hour appointed.

She returned to her chair, and sat with her eyes on the door. Her face was cold and inanimate. It looked like a beautiful mask. It was no mask, however. One does not wear a mask when alone, and she would not have worn this face had any one, even a servant, been present.

Her life, crammed full, like the life of all women of fashion, with cinematograph flittings of functions, left her but little time for thought beyond the planning of the day's engagements and the toilettes in which she would keep these. For sufficient for the fashionable woman's day are the engagements thereof, and the day not seldom far from sufficient for its engagements.

Having only just returned to Town, the hail of invi-

tation-cards now whitening her mantelshelf, a hail which had followed sharply upon the notice in the *Post* of her arrival, were for functions not yet due, however. And so she had found an interval for meditation.

She sat, cold and impassive, as though looking her life in the face had turned her own to stone.

When a bell rang, she put on again the face which was in truth a mask, and donned her customary smile of animation.

She was strangely beautiful in her ethereal gown of smoke, the neutral key of it throwing up the richness of her hair and accentuating her intense pallor.

When the door opened, the visitor proved to be Monica Lygon.

Mrs. Ferrers' animation clouded over when she saw her. Monica seldom wore black; Mrs. Ferrers had never before seen her in mourning, and she had not seen her since her boy's death. She showed so wan and hueless, and her eyes so haunting-dark beneath her black hat, as to be quite tragic.

They shook hands in silence. Mrs. Ferrers, with her accustomed tact—for she had not foreseen that a grief now three months old should be still so acute as this mother's suddenly quivering lip betrayed—laid her other hand on that in hers, in silent sympathy.

Monica withdrew her hand at once. In the battle between two women for a man, *victrix* may feel kind toward vanquished, but vanquished never to her who has despoiled her.

Mrs. Ferrers waited for her guest to speak. Monica's letter had implied that she had something of moment to say. In view of this and in the presence of her tragic face, she felt that banal conventions would have been ill-placed. Both of these women were at once too clever and too large of mind to pretend friendship for one another. They were courteous and gracious, but with the courtesy and graciousness of sworn foes.

Then Monica said quietly:

"I wish to speak about my husband. Will you forgive me if I speak quite plainly?"

"Do, by all means, if you wish it." The silver voice was gentle. In truth, Mrs. Ferrers admired and liked this other, and had it been possible would, more than any woman she knew, have desired her for a friend. And she was awed now by her look of suffering and by a grave detachment about her, as of one whose last ties with life had been severed.

The silver voice added yet more gently:

"You know, of course, how little is ever gained by talking of things—except pain and generally further misunderstanding."

"I must say what I have come to say. I think you may be suffering from a misconception, and it may influence you perhaps to know my point of view. I have come to plead with you for—Morant."

Mrs. Ferrers made a gesture of protest.

"I have not seen him for three months. Nor have I written to him, except once, a month since, in reply to a letter of his."

Monica threw out her black-gloved hands.

"I have come to beg of you to see him, to write to him—to be friendly with him. He is ill . . . changed. He suffers horribly. Why should his life be spoiled? It is not his fault that instead of loving me . . . he loves you."

The heaving of her breast checked speech.

She added hotly:

"What do you want in a man? How can any woman dare ask in a man more than Morant is? And he has loved you all these years. Oh, it is cruel—arrogant to be so heartless . . . to be indifferent to such a man as he."

Again she strove with her emotion.

"If I am in the way—if any thought of me is in-

fluencing you, I am here to beg of you . . . to make him happy. I will release him, and you can then be married. I can bear anything rather than to feel myself the obstacle to his happiness."

Mrs. Ferrers' face had lost its pleasing animation, growing cold and set again before the wife's arraignment.

"You love him yourself."

Monica withdrew again quickly within her reserves. She had betrayed more than she had intended.

"You have no right to say it—to think it. One may be just—without caring."

The other laughed curtly.

"This is more than justice; it is magnanimity, and magnanimity possible only to a woman in love." She added with a quiet irony: "Yet why be ashamed of loving your husband—you who have never been in other ways a slave to fashion?"

They sat regarding one another with a fixity bordering on fierceness, Monica in a sort of desperate anger that this woman should be so strong and beautiful and mistress of her tragic fate, Mrs. Ferrers for a reason she was to explain.

After a long silence she said with sudden softness:

"Do not hate me so, I beg of you."

For answer Monica gave a smothered cry, whether in denial or to express that she was powerless to do otherwise was not clear.

Mrs. Ferrers spoke again.

"It has been said that to understand all is to forgive all. Let me take a lesson from you in generosity. At all events, let me be candid and try to make you understand—and so perhaps forgive."

Her voice became ironic.

"Do you know, I would give all that I have or have ever had to feel as you are feeling now. Everything in life—zest, interest, happiness—depends on the value we set upon things: on the emotional value we set upon

things and on persons. I will tell you a secret. I have never told it before and nobody has ever guessed it. I am incapable of love. I have had most things in life, but this has been denied me. And I would give up everything I possess for this . . . because it is the very greatest power in life.

"You will see a woman treasure some trifle given to her by a man she loves—treasure it and find far more joy and happiness in it than the woman incapable of love is able to feel in her richest possessions. And it is this magic of life that I have never felt, that I most envy. All my life I have been admired and loved; I am sick to death of being admired and loved. I feel as sick of it as Midas must have felt of gold. Everything he touched turned into gold, just as men's feeling for me turns to love—even though I do not touch them!

"One has no use for more than a certain amount of gold. It is the same with men and love. At first it is intoxicating to feel this power, but it palls—horribly. The happiest women are those who love and are loved in return by one man only, and do not care a fig for any other.

"Love and admiration feed one's vanity, of course, but vanity is an unsatisfying sentiment to live upon. It is a horrible fatality that I make others feel for me emotions I would give my very eyes to feel in return. There is nothing I would not exchange—health, wealth, looks, my fatal power—if only I could feel intensely, suffer intensely, enjoy intensely.

"I have envied my own kitchenmaid, because the silly creature was great enough and foolish enough to sacrifice everything to a scamp who seduced and deserted her. Not because she had yielded—numbers of women do this from various motives—but because she had yielded to an overwhelming and, to me, an impossible devotion.

"I had her taken care of when her child was born;

and to see her lie, a little ghost from eating out her heart for her deceiver, her face filled with beautiful light, bent over what was to her the greatest marvel of the world, *his* child, was to see the transfiguration of a kitchenmaid to a Madonna. One felt small and provincial beside her. For one is small and provincial until the nature has reached its culmination in a great passion. Only those to whom this has happened have lived. The others are blind men and women who have never seen the light."

Monica listened with an amazement bordering on incredulity. This famous, highly privileged woman, envying her deserted kitchenmaid! Had it not been for a sincerity as hard and cold as steel, which showed in face and voice, she could have believed nothing but that this was a pose. As it was, she could not doubt her.

"The poor thing's love brought her only misfortune," she said. "Love seems always to do that."

"It brought her life. To feel deeply, even though one only suffers, is as much better than negation as life is better than stupor."

"But why, then, if you wish to feel deeply, do you reject—Morant?"

"Because not he or any man has the power to make me feel what it lies beyond my power to feel. As well tell a blind man to enjoy light and color, as to tell a woman incapable of love to find joy in a man. I admit Morant's qualities; I find him the most attractive and interesting man I have known. But there is no sorcery about it; I cannot invest him with any of the glamor that made my kitchenmaid's butcher-boy—for her—a Romeo.

"I am not passionless, but I am emotionless. And mere passion without emotion is too crude an instinct to satisfy a woman of complex organization. Emotion is passion on the imaginative plane, and it invests passion with such a glamor as to transform what is otherwise

a mere biological fact into an amazing verity. But without this emotional transfiguration, the biological fact offends the fastidious mind of a complex woman.

"Nature is infinitely wise, full of subtle design, and her intention is plainly to make the fact so crude that for all higher organizations it shall be acceptable only when wrapped in a haze of emotion. For Nature does not want indiscriminate, but only selected matings.

"To a complex woman, one with an appreciation of the true values of things, mere physical attraction isn't 'good enough,' as men say, although they seldom say it in this connection! With men, passion is cruder, more dominant, and less selective. Because women are the root-stock of the Race, and the evolution of the Race is involved in their conduct in sex-matters, the instinct is greatly more subtle and selective in them, and with women of high organization only the glamor and color of the emotions can give it impulse enough to become fact."

Her voice changed. The note of irony returned to it.

"Do you suppose," she asked, "that it is mere conventional morality which keeps me from throwing in my lot with Morant? As I tell you, I find him the most attractive and interesting man I have known. I only wish I could find him more—wish I could find in myself any of the magic that would make it worth while to fly in the face of the world and consider all well lost for his sake. But I know myself too well. I know that after the charm of novelty had worn away, he would get on my nerves distressingly, would keep me always criticizing him and finding him fall short of my exacting standards.

"Heavens! One sees it on all sides. There are many women of my type to-day. We are the product of our times, the product of a craze that ignores and is doing its best to train out the all-important differences between the sexes. The result is, that during the years when



Nature needs leisure of body and mind in order to develop the emotions, these are starved and stunted by the perpetual forcing and drilling of what is called education—brain-strain and body-strain. Emotions are the blossoms of the nature, and starved and stunted natures do not blossom.

"Sometimes, realizing all that I have lost, the emotional womanhood that was my right and that would have made my life delightful, I detest my mother for having spoilt me by an artificial training. For she trained me as strenuously for the marriage-market as some girls are trained to become acrobats.

"Seeing that I had looks and brains, she determined that I should make a successful marriage. From my earliest childhood she drilled and taught, and grafted accomplishments all over me. The result was that my natural growth was thwarted. I sprouted artificial accomplishments from every finger-tip at the cost of my heart and emotions. The artificial grafts absorbed my natural powers, and I became the abnormal thing I am—an emotionless, joyless, empty-hearted woman.

"In ninety cases out of a hundred, such artificial over-training makes plain, ineffective neuters of women. By a miracle my looks were spared. But as Madame de Staël would gladly have exchanged her cleverness for a beautiful face, I would gladly exchange both my face and my brains for the capacity to love, without which life is—no matter what its other conditions—not worth the having."

Monica listened spellbound to this amazing confession.

Under her surprise lay a bitter heartache, and still profounder amazement that a woman loved by Morant could be anything but radiantly happy.

"But why, then, if you do not care for men, do you make them love you?"

Mrs. Ferrers shrugged a charming shoulder.

"One must do something with one's life. Although

I cannot love these men, it gives me the only gratification left to me, to feel my power over them—a poor thing possibly, but mine only resource, lacking a better!

“I please myself by believing myself the founder of a School of Love, and by developing the higher branches of this human art. It is one women are neglecting nowadays. They are fools to do so. The very highest talent of our sex is to make men love us; not in merely crude and biological fashion, but in complex and æsthetic ways.

“Every man has a soul—I do not mean a churchwarden soul, but a Nature-soul—and it is the function of his woman to find it for him. Natural man is a rather simple creature, always something of a boy. He lacks some of the subtler qualities of woman; but he has other qualities—and very fine qualities—which *she* lacks. Yet in love and all its issues, woman is supreme.

“Most men respond readily and gladly to higher things. The women of many of them would stare to see how capable they are—when the right note is struck—of answering to high and delicate issues of this complex sentiment. For the most part, they take their cue in this from women. And women who are clever and artistic in other directions are sometimes crude and stupid in this. One sees them strumming, thrumming, drumming all the while upon a few crude sense-notes, until sense becomes so dulled as to cease to answer to emotion.

“Only think of treacle, treacle all the while, and not a drop of nectar for the soul to drink! I tell you, it is an absolute charity on my part to give some of these masculine starved souls a crumb or two of imaginative sustenance to keep life in them!”

“It is anything but a charity to the women who love them,” Monica said bitterly. “After knowing you, how can they help feeling dissatisfied with average women. And since you give them nothing but crumbs in return,

and since men cannot live on crumbs, you make them unhappy and their wives or sweethearts miserable. So, it seems to me, you create unhappiness all round."

"You are quite wrong. It does these men all the good in the world to show them the higher meanings and possibilities of love: it raises their conception of life and of womanhood. If it makes them unhappy, they are unhappy with a discontent that is a gain.

"*The* great bar to human advancement is smug satisfaction with ignoble things. In my School of Love I draw all the best in them, the energy and fire and intellect, into their passion for me. Most of them have never previously associated the highest in them with passion, but have treated passion as an elemental instinct.

"When one lifts their passion for them to imaginative planes, they are intoxicated with the wonder of it. When I have done with them, I send them back to their women with new ideals.

"If their women are not properly grateful, and are incapable of keeping alive these finer sentiments, the fault is theirs, not mine. If they would do so, they might reap much from the increased emotional range their men have acquired in my academy."

She laughed, mockery and humor in her sphinx-eyes.

"It is extraordinary," Monica said, "that if you cannot yourself love, you should be able to teach others to do so."

"Not at all. The best teacher of singing may be himself as hoarse as a crow. And if I were myself in love with any one of these men, I should doubtless lose my power—I should certainly lose my interest in whipping up the passion of the others. Every woman possesses this power over a man who loves her.

"But, heavens! how little women know of the most vital and important thing in life!"

"We are not all so clever as you, nor have we so many opportunities to learn these wisdoms."

"Well, never envy me," the other answered, sighing. "If I could feel the supreme emotion for one man, be sure I should never trouble myself to school these others."

An observer with a turn for psychology would have seen that she was talking mainly out of long-pent anger and bitterness. Once in a lifetime every man and woman unburdens the story of his or her heart to some fellow-creature, even though this be only a stranger in a train. It is an uncontrollable necessity, failing which the burdened mind might lose its balance.

"And you can say all this when . . . Morant loves you," Monica said reproachfully.

"I can; because I do not love him in return. We emotionless women see with painful clearness. I know that novelty might charm a union with him for weeks, or even months, but not for longer; and a lifelong irksome bondage is too great a price to pay for some months of illusion. When love is an emotion it engages the soul, and so it is always renewing itself and does not pall. But when love is merely passion and only flesh-deep, one quickly plumbs its shallows, and it palls insufferably—I mean, of course, for persons of sufficient imagination to rise above biological levels."

As though her obligation to confess could not content itself with half-measures, now she fastened a clear and whimsical gaze upon her listener.

"Since we are telling the truth to one another, let it be the whole truth. It may surprise you to learn that I have not been so obdurate as you suppose. In spite of my convictions, I only just escaped the frightful blunder of going away with your husband."

"I guessed, of course. I wondered why——"

"Cyril died just then."

Monica's white face grew whiter.

"And now?"

"Now?" Mrs. Ferrers repeated.

With a smile upon her fine lips and a sparkle in her eyes, she added:

"I have yet another surprise for you. For now Morant has backed out of his proposal. Now he throws me over unconditionally. I could not, of course, have told you of our intention, had I not been able to tell you that he has now firmly and finally declined to be anything nearer or dearer to me than a man and a brother."

At this amazing intelligence, Monica was stricken dumb, her heart thumping tattoos of emotion, her brain forging thunderbolts in a suddenly blue sky.

When she found words, she said:

"Oh, how can it be true? He is so unhappy. I came to plead for him, because I could bear losing him rather than to be the cause of his unhappiness."

"Magnanimous—but quixotic! No man is worth such unselfish devotion. Although, I admit, if we were to begin meting out justice to one another, it would be a bad day for all the generous impulses that keep the world going."

She rose and, unlocking a drawer of her bureau, took out a letter.

Across the room, Monica's eager eyes discerned her husband's writing.

"It is a shocking breach of faith, of course, to show a man's letter to his wife," her rival said, smiling, as she put it into her hand, "but I think you have deserved to know the truth."

Monica read the letter once with eyes that almost feared to look. She read it a second and a third time with eyes that clung to every syllable, streaming tears of joy.

"Oh, may I keep it? I pray you to let me keep it."

But Mrs. Ferrers took it from her quickly.

"No," she said. "I want it for myself. I don't usually keep letters, but this is a very fine one. And I tell you, I would give much to be able to love this man as

he deserves to be loved. Because it is not only me he here of his free will gives up, but it is that much better thing—the woman he believes me.”

She proclaimed herself emotionless, but at this moment there was feeling of the highest order in her face and voice.

“And . . . he says . . . it is for my sake,” Monica faltered, sitting physically crushed with unaccustomed happiness. “But do you think this is final?”

“I am sure of it. It is his last word in the matter. And I agree with him. Apart from other considerations, it would have been, as I have said, a grave mistake. A passionate man like Morant needs a woman like you, one of deep emotions, to satisfy and keep him happy. Only the gods—who perhaps understand why men blunder as they do in these things—can tell why he wanted any other. How in the world have you failed to make him devotedly in love with you? You and he were made for one another. Some crass misunderstanding must have sent him seeking outside his home, when all he wants is there. Has he a suspicion that you love him?”

Monica shook her head, her eyes kindling to her thoughts.

This, then, had been the meaning of his proposal that they should resume their life together!

“He does not know. How could I let him know, when I knew he did not care for me?”

Mrs. Ferrers touched the letter.

“This is an excellent way of caring,” she said dryly. “Men may care a good deal for a woman, and will yet not give up anything for her. Believe me, a man never foregoes for a woman something he has set his heart upon unless he is a good deal fond of her.”

“Can it be possible?”

Mrs. Ferrers smiled.

“If he does not love you as he should, go home and make him do so. He knows his world, and when he

finds how much you love him, he will know how few men ever get—or perhaps deserve—such devotion. I predict that you will shortly be a model couple. But never forget that if I have been a cause of pain to you, I have done for him what you, his wife, had failed to do. When he entered my School,” she smiled enchantingly, “he knew no more than the mere rudiments of loving. I return him to you trained in its higher and more subtle branches. You should have taught him these things. You are a woman eminently fitted to have done so.”

“I was so young when we were married. And then estrangement came. And then you came.”

“Well, thank your stars it happened to be me who came. Somebody was sure to come. And not every woman is content with the relation of pedagogue and pupil. And you now,” she ended with a sigh, “are to reap the harvest of my pains.”

“Oh, what a sweet and noble woman you are!” Monica cried impetuously. “Why have I not always known it of you? But every one shall know now what a splendid heart you have.”

Mrs. Ferrers held up an admonishing hand.

“You must never tell what I have told you.”

“Oh! Never a syllable.”

“I knew I could trust you, or I should not have confessed. To be known as a school-marm, even though one teaches in a School of Love, would be odious.”

Monica, in a white-heat of joy, responded warmly to her charming friendliness and humor.

“How can men help loving you? You are so generous and kind, as well as beautiful and clever.”

The other laughed.

“Let them love me if they must. The mistake they make is to want me for their firesides. Women like me are fitted only for the *salon* and for public life, not for home. We have none of the qualities of wife and mother. The Greeks were wise. They set us as a class

apart, the Hetairæ, distinct and separate from the wife and mother. The Hetairæ were frequently, but not always, courtesans.

"These two sorts of women should be clearly distinguished. And the women who are by nature or by manufacture Hetairæ should never become wives and mothers, because they lack the necessary qualifications. You, now, are clever, but superbly normal. You do not bristle with abilities; much of your power is locked up in emotion and in character. You are the perfect type of wife and mother. Your beautiful boy was the very highest human being I have ever seen!"

"But you—if you had been happy enough to have had children, how beautiful and clever they would have been with such a mother."

For the first time during this strange interview, Mrs. Ferrers assumed that sphinx-expression for which she was famed.

"You think that?" she said, her mind at work behind her agate-green irides.

"I am sure of it. And it is a thousand pities that you have no child, because you would have been so happy in your beautiful children."

The sphinx-look gave place again to that of the fine candor of her earlier mood.

"Well, now," she said, "since we are speaking the truth to one another, you and I, again let it be the whole truth. But I must ask this time for a promise of absolute secrecy; for I am about to show you my Blue-Beard chamber. Will you promise not to breathe a word of what I shall show you?"

"I promise—sacredly, of course," said Monica, in wonder. "But do not show me if it will pain you."

"It will not pain me as such a thing would pain you. My lack of emotion, if it deprives me, also spares me much. My skeleton-cupboard hurts my pride atrociously, and outrages my self-respect. However, come!"



With her characteristic swiftness she swept up the room and out by the door, glancing back for Monica to follow.

She led the way to the top floor, and to that skeleton of her handsome house which those who envied and admired her had never suspected.

Knocking upon a door, this was unlocked and opened by a middle-aged woman in nursing uniform. On seeing a stranger, she made as though to close the door again. But her mistress pushed it wide, for Monica to enter.

She found herself in a large bright room streaming with morning sunshine, which poured in through two bay windows. It was furnished pleasantly, and showed like a housekeeper's room, or that of some other such functionary. Just now it was littered with toys, and Monica, to her amazement, saw a child in it—a child with red-brown hair like Mrs. Ferrers'. She looked about ten years old, but was some years older. She sat in a low chair, with an air of listless dejection, her back crooked, her chin dropped forward on her chest.

At the sound of voices, she raised and turned her face with slow inertness, fixing a dull and unintelligent gaze upon the visitors.

There was something of Mrs. Ferrers in the features, but the eyes were unlike, being watery-blue in color. Such likeness as there was repelled, was something to shudder at, for it made this face show like a malicious caricature of the other peerless one. The eyes had no light or luster in them, but leered stupidly. The nose was flattened, the lips lax. They drooped dejectedly, and from the corners of the mouth a dribble of saliva ran. One arm and shoulder revolved and revolved in aimless automatic motion.

Now and again inarticulate sounds like those of an animal broke from her loose lips. The poor thing was a hopeless imbecile.

"Behold my beautiful and clever child!" her mother cried bitterly, pointing an almost taunting finger at her.

The girl raised a hand in feeble imitation, and crooked an inept clumsy finger in retort. She laughed senselessly, a fearsome, distressing sound.

"Oh, the poor thing! the poor thing!" Monica said, all the mother in her moved to pity by this terrible travesty of lovely childhood.

The girl, some gleam of intelligence in the dark-shuttered house of her brain revealing the stranger's sympathy, checked her foolish laughter and became mournfully solemn, gazing with lack-luster eyes. Then she began to sob and moan dejectedly.

Monica, welling with pity, went to her, and kneeling, mopped the dribble of her mouth. She stroked her cheek, and smiled and spoke to her encouragingly.

The poor thing checked her sobs and laughed again, senselessly and distressingly.

It was a deplorable sight.

"Come!" Mrs. Ferrers said suddenly, in a hard voice. Her eyes were agate on the child who since her birth had been a cause of ceaseless and unspeakable mortification to her. "Come! you have been victimized enough."

Outside the door, she asked, shuddering:

"How could you bear to touch her—to touch such a terrible unnatural thing?"

"Oh, she is a child," Monica said pitifully. "And it is so sad for her."

"She makes such terrible noises, and dribbles all over one," her mother said, with a shiver of disgust. "I cannot bear to be longer than a minute in the room with her."

Monica, however, out of her warm emotions was reflecting as they went that if this child had been hers, then in remorse for the maimed existence she had brought into being, she would wrap her away from every one, and would herself so tend her that no eyes save

those of her supremest love and pity should behold the poor thing's shame.

In the boudoir Mrs. Ferrers said:

"She is my unspeakable humiliation. The thought of her is a perpetual goad. It would drive me mad to have her with me, and she is leaving to-morrow with her nurses for a Rest-home. She has been at 'Roseberry,' close to you at Travenhoe. I put her with Dr. Corry, whom you know, because I had heard he was clever in the treatment of such children. But once when I went to see her I encountered a horrible homicidal maniac, and I could not bear to visit the house again. So I am sending her elsewhere. Nobody has a notion, of course, of my relationship with her. In the house she is supposed to be a distant relative. Nobody knows I ever had a child. I was abroad when she was born. I believe the shock of being father to this terrible creature brought on the illness of which my husband died."

"I am so grieved for you. It must be such a constant pain."

The other shook her head.

"Remember, I am not like you. I don't feel it as you would. It is my pride that suffers. Motherhood, the power of creating beautiful living beings, is the very highest power we women have. And this is *my* rendering of it; because my finest power was frittered and exhausted in learning parlor-tricks."

Her tone of bitterness gave way again to one of philosophy.

"The perpetration of this atrocity set me thinking. I had previously thought, as most persons do, that my child would inherit my capacities. I see now that I spent the powers of my potential children in the acquisition of these artificial talents. Only those women have fine children, much of whose power remains unexpended, locked up in character and constitution, for an evolutionary reservoir for the next generation. Those who

wish to do their whole duty to the Race by having beautiful and clever children must be content to forego some of their power, holding it in trust for such possible children."

She stopped abruptly.

"I bore you with my disquisitions. My excuse is that you are such a sympathetic listener. Now I must lock my lips again and resume my rôle of sphinx. While you"—she smiled ruefully—"you must fly home and make this foolish man of yours devotedly in love with you, and thank your stars for happiness denied to me."

Monica must first fling her arms about her new-found friend, however, and clasp and kiss her strenuously.

"Why did you not let me know you before?" she protested. "Let us be dear, dear friends."

Mrs. Ferrers shook her beautiful head.

"We could not, of course. There would always be—Morant and memories between us. Besides, I am going into hermitage. I cannot keep my looks and popularity forever, and I will not fight for what has always come to me without effort. I shall withdraw gracefully from the scene—while I am still graceful. I am weary of it all, and shall be glad to escape. After this—my last season—my world will see me no more. I shall take up literature, movements, perhaps good works. It is the only way to grow old with dignity."

She kissed Monica once.

"I should have loved to have a woman-friend," she said. "And I have deserved it of women, because I have kept their men at bay. But they have always hated me—because I had to keep their men at bay!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### AT TRAVENHOE

**M**ONICA, on her way home, athrill with happiness, found Malet with Carry and Elfie at Waterloo.

There had been an expedition to the Zoo, and Elfie had found such marvels there as even her fertile fancy had not conjured. Her little elfin face and eyes were aglow with memories.

Carry, her cold, resentful spirit nursing the slight she considered Lady Lygon had put upon her in leaving her out of her hospitalities, was stiff and awkward.

Malet, now a frequent and a valued guest at Travenhoe, presented Elfie, whom Monica had not yet seen. Her heart, all joy and tenderness, swung wide to the little engaging creature.

Carry, her cold, resentful spirit nursing the slight she  
"Let us travel together, and then little Elfie can tell me the wonders she saw at the Zoo."

"I rode on an elinphant," Elfie said proudly; "and a parrot wiv a blue and yellow tail said, 'How-de doo?' to me. An' I want a darling little penguin for a baby."

Carry was all excitement at the thought of traveling in Lady Lygon's company. All Foxgate, she knew, would hear of it; and more to her than anything she did was what her neighbors thought of anything she did.

Accordingly Monica, not without a sigh for the lost joy of a journey in company alone with her new thoughts, seated herself in her corner with Elfie on her knee. And Elfie, who in her precocity was Twentieth Century to the finger-tips of her new gloves, straightway

propounded a question she put to all strangers before entering upon further terms with them.

"Have you ever flied in an aeroplane?"

A quest long unrewarded was successful.

"Yes, dear," Monica answered, glowing upon her out of warm dark eyes. "I went flying once with Mr. Black in his airship."

Elfie clapped her hands in triumph. For next to flying in her own person—her vaulting ambition—it was to sit upon the knee of one who had so flown. Her quick imagination lightly bridged the gulf between.

Before further questions on this all-enthraling topic however, in order that there should be no mistake about her identity, she explained punctiliously that she was no longer Mrs. Brown, but was now the Queen of the "Cannibal Islands"; that she breakfasted on snakes, dined on bears, and made her tea of little boys.

Carry was on tenter-hooks lest these coarse tastes should lead their aristocratic friend to suppose the child had not been brought up nicely.

But Monica was charmed with the little girl, so charmed that at the end of the journey, which Elfie's vivid fancy had delighted for her, she said cordially to Carry:

"You must come to see me, and bring Elfie to see my white peacocks."

Things at "Roseberry" had been going better.

Carry, from whose allied sharpness and curiosity it was next to impossible to keep secrets, had discovered by this time the true facts of the bond between Peter and Mrs. Ferrers. And now that the patient's removal made it improbable that Peter's admiration for the lady would ever again receive personal stimulus, she was content, and was gradually winning back his old allegiance.

But, as Mrs. Ferrers had told Monica was usual, her influence was salutary now. For Peter, having been

spurred thereby from indolent habits, retained the more helpful and manly methods his passion had inspired. While Carry, brought to value his affection by having stood in danger of losing it, had come to treat him with more amiability.

Carry and Malet became friends in an odd but definite fashion. To please him she even dismissed Elfie's martinet nurse, substituting one of kinder disposition, under whose more cheerful, tolerant sway the child improved in health and happiness.

Lygon was out when Monica reached home. He did not return till shortly before dinner.

He looked weary and depressed.

"Did you see any one you knew in Town?" he asked, as they sat down to dinner.

"I saw Mrs. Ferrers," she answered quietly.

Her eyes were on his face. There came no lightening of its moody dejection. She wondered with a leap of joy whether this name of names had ceased to thrill him.

The subject dropped, dying as it seemed of inanition.

Later in the evening, Monica, her heart a-flutter, opened the door of the smoke-room. He was not smoking, but stood with his back to the fireplace in a brown study.

"What is it?" he asked, scanning her lighting face. "Has anything happened?"

"No," she said. "But I am feeling lonely, and have come to sit with you."

"Do." He drew a breath of relief, as though he, too, had been finding solitude a burden.

"I shall be glad to get back to Town next week, and in reach of the Clubs." He added, "These long evenings in the country are the very deuce. How do you manage to get through them? One never catches a glimpse of you."

"I read and sew," she answered, with a glance of humor.

A woman in love is a woman in bloom. He became gradually conscious of a rich and rosy warmth in her, such as he had never previously known.

His long-pent passion suddenly broke cover. He strode forward and stood beside her.

"Monica!" he said impetuously.

Sitting beneath the lamplight, she raised her warm dark eyes. In them he saw again those shy, wild, lovely feelings he had glimpsed before. Now they did not vanish at a glance, however. Now they stood and looked at him with wistful gaze.

At once a thousand knowledges of her passionate and yet virgin nature were revealed, a thousand untrod paths in her his earlier possession had not found. There was heaven in her soul—joy and peace and infinite refreshment. And in her arms was Paradise. She had but to open them and lay her lips to his, and he would find himself in an enchanted kingdom.

He dropped upon his knees beside her.

"Monica!" he said. "Can you not love me—my wife?"

She smiled through her tears.

"Morant," she answered, "I have loved you all these years."

And lo! the gates of the enchanted kingdom opened wide!



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